

THE ANGEL O' DEADMAN



BY
GUY FITCH PHELPS







"It is perfectly lovely, but such a name"

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GUY FITCH PHELPS

AUTHOR OF THE BLACK PROPHET,
THE MOAN OF THE TIBER &c.

CINCINNATI.

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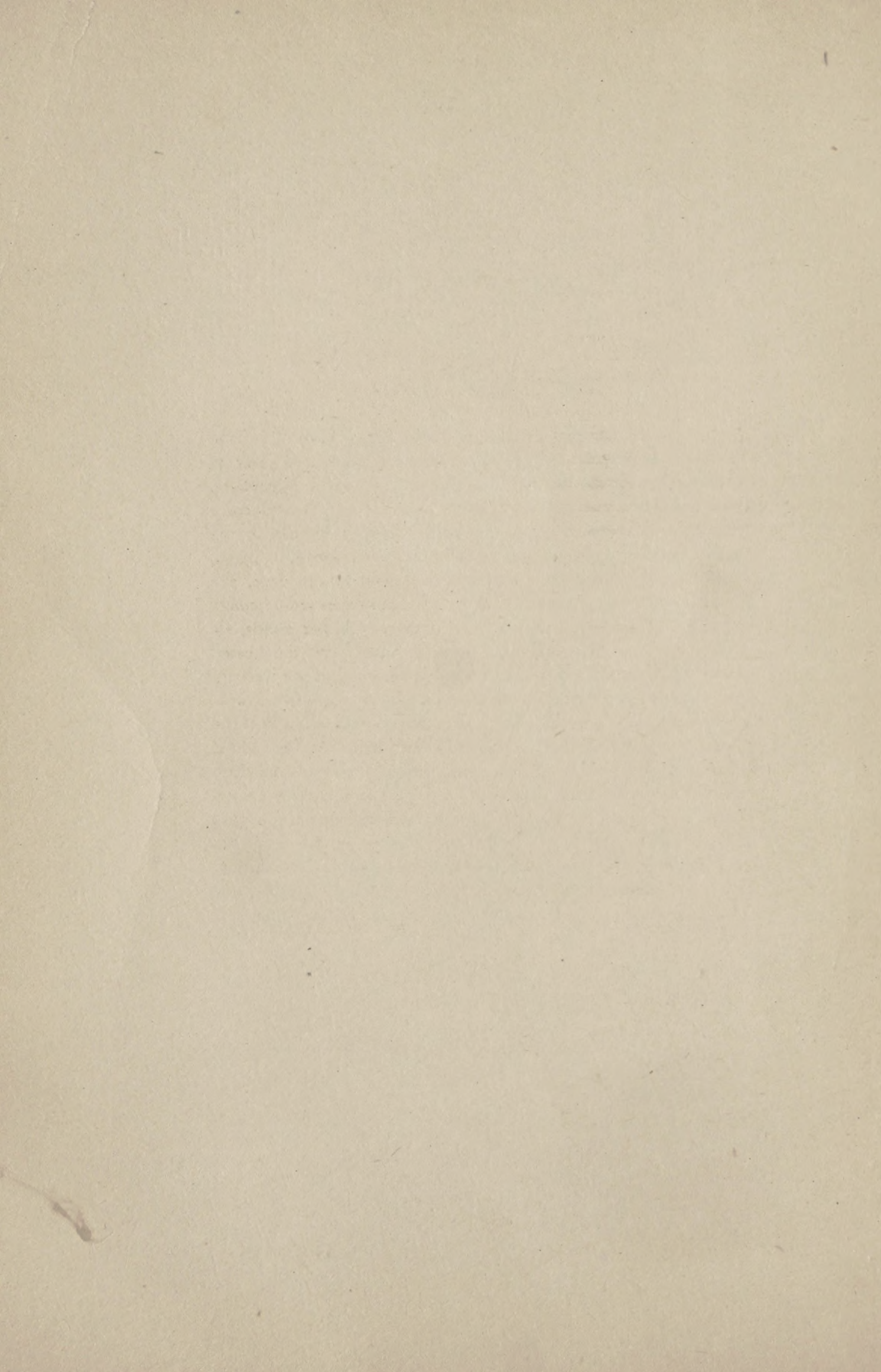
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DEDICATION

I AM dedicating this book to my wife, Ethel Viola. I do so with a feeling that she should be given a prominent place in whatever literary success may come to me. Unselfish as sunlight, she has aided in every way possible to make my dreams come true. To her I have read the crude drafts of books in the making and have always been profited by her judgment. Often, when discouragement stood like a black demon at the door, she has cheered me to try again, assuring me that success would come. When my temples have throbbed from overwork, her hands, always mortgaged to many tasks, have smoothed out the heated nerves and brought rest. Then there is her magical musical gift, her swift witchery of fingers, which wakes something in the instrument which no other touch has ever stirred: how that has kept the bright spirit of art alive in the home. With these she has added herself. It has been something worth while to have eyes like hers to look into, which for expression and beauty surpass even the gazelle's. It has been an inspiration to contemplate her buoyant pleasure when some new achievement has been gained, while her love of nature and childhood, her poetry of spirit and constancy, have sown my way with things of cheer.

THE AUTHOR.

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Pur. B.V. III.



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I

AN INTERRUPTION

IT is perfectly lovely; but such a name!"

So far as she knew, Gene Truxton spoke solely to herself, unless the frisking chipmunk which darted in and out of the shadow of the great pine might have become an unconscious object for the comment. Her hat had been discarded, and her hair fell moist about her face. Her eyes followed the single street of the town, which accommodated itself to the windings of the canyon till an impudent ridge shut the upper end from view. Beyond that, the mountains rose abruptly from a scant margin of level ground. On the other side, the stream rushed in white anarchy over gray boulders and ruby sand. The lower slopes were togaed with world-old pines. Higher up the larches and hemlocks fringed the cliffs with ruffles of blue-green.

The girl's glance ranged over the seamed uplift with a wondering awe. The receding shoulders withdrew from each lower heave till the dream-witched peaks slept against the sky.

There it was, the cast of the wilderness; the patricianism of the steeps.

"It is wonderful—beautiful! But why did they give the place such a name?" The chipmunk sat up to hear the question again.

"I think I can tell you that, if you will permit me," said a voice near her. Turning in a half-frightened way, Gene saw a tall young man moving toward her. His eyes were bent indifferently on her face, and he walked with the spring of some wild creature. There was a kindle of fire in his willful gray eyes which stamped him the leader born.

Gene rose as he came near, and stood looking at him questioningly.

"Hope I didn't frighten you. Sit down and take it easy. Just came down the trail from the mine, and this load of drills made it warm work—the shade is thoroughly grateful. Stranger in camp?" He threw himself on the pine grass, motioned her to do the same, then turned his glance on her face with a directness she could feel.

"I suppose you would call us strangers; we got here last night," she replied, coloring slightly.

"A summer proposition, I take it—an outing, in other words. Don't suppose you will run up a cabin, will you?"

"If we can't find one already up, we will. Papa has been dreaming of a fireplace and the luxury of tin dishes so long it would be a positive sin to disappoint him. Aunt Ruth is quite skeptical about the whole matter, however, and insists that we stay in the hotel."

"Is your father a miner?"

"He was, in his earlier life."

"But not now?"

"He owns some property here, and is manager for others."

"I see. And your mother—?"

"My mother—is—dead." The girl's eyes become moist.

"I beg your pardon for that question. Of course, all this was none of my business. How do you like the layout—I mean the camp and the country?"

"It is splendid, all but the name; that is horrid!"

"I agreed to tell you about that, didn't I? Well, it's not a long story, and runs about like this: An old prospector in one of the camps to the south had a dream that if he would go one hundred miles north, he would find a region rich in mineral deposits. He told his dream to a few, and was promptly set down as crazy. But, believing he was led of spirits, or Providence, he packed his burro and disap-

peared. The next year some miners crossed the range and came to this place. They got here late in the evening, and made camp for the night. The next morning they discovered prospect holes in the sides of the hills, and before noon came upon a place where a campfire had been made. Later they discovered the remains of the burro, and, not far away, the bones of the old miner. A grizzly had done for them both. But he had struck it—struck it rich. So they called the camp Deadman, and that's the history of the case. I don't know about the dream part of it. Some would say an angel visited the old trailer, but not I."

While he was speaking, Gene studied his face closely. There was no doubt about its being interesting. Contrary to most of his class, he was clean-shaven. He had remarkable eyes; but there was that in them which told of storm-like passion and sin. His teeth were set evenly in a firm jaw, and his mouth, though framed in almost womanly tenderness, showed unconquerable determination. Handsome and wicked, was what Gene decided. She especially liked his high, straight forehead and tumbled brown hair. Then, he was broad of shoulder without being burly, and knit like wire. The cast of his features reminded her of ancient Greek models, and she always had been an ad-

mirer of the old art. Not over twenty-eight, she decided regarding his age.

But, if there were things about this man which were interesting, there were also some things to be regretted. Once he used an oath and was not aware of it. His self-assurance made her uneasy. There was the independence of a mountain flood about him.

"You will get used to the name all right," he finished, turning toward her.

"Perhaps," she replied, fluttering the leaves of the little morocco copy of St. John which lay in her lap.

"Do you believe that?" he asked abruptly, almost brutally.

"I do. Don't you?" Gene kindled at his words. The frankness of this man was not the least of his qualities.

"No."

"Why?"

"Oh, I think it would be the truth if I should say I was born a doubter—that's about it. My folks look at those things as you do, and they are a docile people. My brothers never chased anything but corn-rows and quaking coons. They go to church every Sunday, and tell stories to the children. But that was not for me. I was wild as the winds, and longed for action. I read of men with brawn, men of

courage, and I longed to be with them. I had a thirst for the mountains and the desert. I wanted the open land, the vast spaces, and I came to them. None of the other for me; I never could get down to that." He seemed to find satisfaction in his declarations, also in the slight expression of worry on the girl's face. Suddenly his manner changed.

"There, I didn't mean to be abrupt. Don't pay any attention to what I said."

"I won't," she replied, with a smile.

He looked up quickly, attracted by the colorless tone of her voice, and his glance seemed to penetrate to her brain. Then his eyes clouded. It was evident that he was accustomed to having his way with women. There was that about him which showed that he was not in the habit of meeting a difference of opinion, so far as they were concerned.

In a moment his face cleared. "What were you reading?" he asked, reaching for the book.

"It was where Christ cleansed the temple," she answered, indicating the place with her finger.

"Oh, I see. He is speaking of prayer. Do you believe in that?" There was almost impatience in his tone, something which told her that her answer would confirm or destroy a somewhat favorable opinion he had formed of her.

"I do, certainly," Gene replied, returning his glance with eyes as steady and fearless as his.

For some time he continued looking at her, as if to adjust her to a new mental conception.

"You believe prayer is answered, then, of course?"

"Yes, when it should be—when it is best for us."

"I see. Well, then, suppose you try it on me." A bantering smile played over his mouth as he uttered the challenge.

"I will," Gene replied firmly.

He broke into rollicking laughter. "That will do for fair. But, had you known me just a little, you would have hesitated before making that contract. Frankly, I am rather wild when it comes to the melee and the bar mixtures, and—I swear."

"I know you do; you have done so since talking to me. I am sure you would enjoy a fight."

"Have I?" he asked, coloring. "But you will have to get used to that if you stay here very long," he continued, doggedly.

"But I shall not get used to it!" Her voice was decided.

"Your church notions will have to be pretty well rooted to stand the strain in this region.

I've seen a good many wilt after coming here. They hold out all right for a time, then the tide catches them, and down they go. But one can have a place to draw the line without that. I only go so far; I'm not all bad."

"That's encouraging." She smiled tantalizingly.

"Do you consider it so?"

"Yes."

"And you think you can resist the general order of things here?"

"I certainly do—my views are quite deeply set."

"But I had no thought of making a confession."

"It would not injure you, I venture, and it was that in part."

He smiled. "I am a long road from repentance, even for the bad I permit myself."

"There is not a doubt of that," she agreed frankly.

"You read me for a thoroughly hard case, then?"

"You say it yourself; why should I doubt it?"

"But I'm honest, and I won't steal. There's a lot of things I won't do. I won't murder or lie."

"There's plenty left."

He looked up quickly, and the gray eyes clashed with the blue ones. In that look she saw that she had misjudged him.

"You should not say such things about yourself. You know the law is to rate one at his own estimate."

"That's true, no doubt. But men are not hypocrites in this country; they don't wear masks. They look the goodly sun in the face and drink the wine of life from a scented chalice. What they are, they are; though I hardly think the bland-faced gentleman who holds out in camp as the oracle of the Supernatural, would care to receive these men, who go about with the bark on, into his communion."

"There's a minister here, then?"

"Yes, I suppose you would call him that. He poses as quite a missionary to the heathen."

"I am glad to hear that. It certainly means much for one to bury himself in such a place for the good he can do."

"I do not agree with you. Compare this land with the one he came from. Overstocked with preachers, who talk the same old things over to the same sleepy listeners where it has been done for generations. All their mole-hills are named, and every duck puddle is exalted into a lake. Over there is a cornfield; down the lane is a clump of maples and a schoolhouse;

while on every hand it's all a dead level. Their streams are agony in mud. Their feet are weak from flat walking. It's a humdrum existence which he was lucky—whether we are or not—to get out of. Look at this land. Those peaks, with snow that never melts, and wild goats on the cliffs. These forests and canyons, as full of mystery as the heart is of blood. Listen to the streams down there, white and clear as starlight. Don't pity him, please; he's found his chance to do something—but he won't; it's not in him. But he'll just suit you, I am sure, for he talks eternally about college, and has all the dapper airs of the elite East. But there's not a color of manhood in him."

Gene passed the reflection with a smile. "Perhaps; I have known many good men in the ministry—some very good." The last words might bear something of an explanation, he thought.

"How about the others?"

"I never found them doing wrong. But one has the right of choice, even in the ministry, you know."

"I have a contempt for the whole thing. Somehow, it has always seemed ridiculous to me to want the Infinite to hold out in a house. I'd rather have a canyon for a church, with the streams and the winds for a choir. The

old pines take choice texts when they preach, and there is dignity in their messages."

"He is everywhere," Gene replied, reverently, charmed with the man's naturalness of soul and love of nature.

After that they were silent for some time. From below came the crush of the stamps in the quartz-mill, keeping their iron dance over the ore. A blue film lay deep and restful on the tumbled hills. Here and there a peak accented the green immensity with a clear, white face. There was a flame of lark's songs in the air, and vespers in the pine tops. Down one of the mountain trails came a long line of mules; a packtrain was going into camp below the town. Gene watched the deft men casting off the loads, and the animals rolling gratefully in the grass.

"It is grand!" she agreed, her glance roaming over the purple vastness. "I know I shall love it; I love it now."

"This is my God; I worship it!" he exclaimed, taking in earth and sky with a sweep of his hand. "I could bow down to these cliffs and the moonlight on the lakes; for they speak an exalted language to me."

"Rather, the One who made all these is to be worshiped," she corrected; but he did not seem to hear her.

"When the worst there is in me gets loose, and I feel like setting up a twenty-to-the-ounce objection to everything in general, I get out under the hemlocks, and listen to the winds praying in the bunch grass, and the steps of God in the pines, and I lose the fever in a little while and get the right relation of things again. None of your sallow-faced chaps such as this one here, cut out for tea parties and lawn sociables, will do for me. He's one of those fellows made to order. Already he has the long-drawn tone of the pulpit, with the patented mannerisms. To lose them would be to forfeit his standing. What can such a chap know about what may be in the back yard of an ordinary man's soul?"

"I am sorry the missionary has impressed you so unfavorably."

"He'll suit you, I think," he replied, rising and swinging the bundle of drills to his shoulder. "I must get on. Jim will think I have lost the trail—Jim's my partner—and doubtless you will be glad to be restored to your thoughts and quiet. Hope you will not be unduly shocked at the way things are done here. So-long, till I see you again." He took a few steps, then turned back: "My name's Borden, Paul Borden. That's my cabin down there on the slope. Tell your father to call around, and I'll treat him

white. If there's anything I can do to help you get settled, let me know."

"He'll be glad to meet you, I am sure," she replied.

She had risen, and stood watching him as he went down the mountain. There was no denying it, he was different from any man she ever had known.

II

SELECTING A CABIN

THE cabin which Superintendent Truxton selected stood in a crinkle of glades, back from and above the main street of the town.

There was a fringe of firs rimming the openings, while several century-old trees cast their shadows over the house. As she worked, Gene could hear the wind rehearsing some old sorrow among their branches, and she found herself trying to fathom the cosmic sadness in it. A spring burst from the hill near by, like a ruptured artery, and ran with wrinkled face through a trough. At the end it leaped, a glittering bow, into a keg. Gene had gone there repeatedly for water, watching the bucket fill with a feeling that she inherited some vast fullness; for as often as she placed it under the white saber it overflowed, yet she seemed in no way to have interfered with the supply. For a moment there was the changing sound—the flurry of bubbles—then the bucket ran over—and the flashing span curved as before.

All morning she had assailed the oily ac-

cumulations which the miners had permitted, who built the cabin. Kettles of soapy water simmered on the stove, which the two women had demanded in opposition to Superintendent Truxton's wish to eat meat from a frying-pan and his bread out of a Dutch oven. With much good-natured opposition he had made brick dust and bought various compounds, each with a guarantee as an enemy of dirt.

By noon the cabin, which was a double one, was so far in order that Gene felt free to begin cooking. Aunt Ruth had retired to a cool seat under the trees, leaving the girl to follow her whims in the finishing touches to be given things. A few minutes before the meal was ready, her father appeared, smacking his lips and sniffing vigorously.

"Well, now, Gene girl, this is something like it. A whiff of the good old days of sixty-two, when we put up our cabins at Florence, and Alder Gulch, and Bannock, and bucked the gold god at Virginia City," he said, whisking his hat onto the bed. Gene picked it up with a corrective smile and hung it on a nail.

"That is the place, papa; and I am sure you will appreciate it when I tell you I hit my fingers at least three times before I could get it started. Was there ever a woman carpenter?"

"I am grateful for the sacrifice, Gene, and

I shall use it—if I don't forget." He looked at her with a twinkle in his eyes.

"But you mustn't. If you could only see what disorder I found in these rooms, I am sure you would vote me thanks for the appearance of things. The logs were disfigured with tobacco tabs, and I could have filled a box with whisky bottles and baking-powder cans. On the window I found a coil of fuse—I guess you call it that—and some broken drills. And this table was saturated with grease! I came near losing faith in men for once, unless such things are not a test of character."

"But they're not all that way, Gene. Some are neat as wax. Came past a cabin over there by the trail, where a young fellow was fixing things around, and stopped to ask him a few questions, got a glimpse inside—it was spotless. Let me see—Borden, Borden; that was the name he gave me, I think. Don't believe you'd find any trash in his cupboard."

"How about the bottles?"

"Oh, like as not he's *one of the boys* when it comes to that. But you must remember drinking is part of the life of a camp, though I never used much of it myself."

"I think it is awful," Gene objected. "It tends to everything that's bad."

"Yes, yes, that is so. I don't care to argue

the point. I've seen what it will do. Leads to death—and worse."

"It seems too bad that he should insult such a body with that poison," Gene spoke almost resentfully.

"What do you know about him?" The old man looked at her as if he would welcome a chance to tease some one.

"He intruded into my shade long enough yesterday for me to learn that he drinks, at least on occasion, and that he is an infidel," she replied, coloring a little.

"Does seem too bad that a young fellow will tempt Providence that way, don't it?"

"Do be serious, papa," Gene protested, assuming a little resentment.

"I am thoroughly in earnest, child; I mean every word of it. But I think your meat is burning; better see to it. Did I say I was hungry?"

"Men are always hungry, by authority of the old saying."

"More truth than anything else in that. Something about being in the mountains makes a fellow wolfish. It's grand, Gene, girl! Hear the pines out there. Many's the time I've kept awake to listen to that sound, when the rest of the boys were asleep. It'll make one melancholy, if he don't have a care. Once the passion

of it gets into the blood, it stays—stays, that's all. I've gone to my room in the great hotels, and found myself wishing I was back under the clear sky, with my blankets spread on the bare ground; a water-hole for a looking-glass, and a tuft of needles for a chair. Now I'm back to it, thank Heaven! and I want to enjoy it to the full. Sometime you'll make coffee for me in the fireplace, where it can spill over, and bread in the Dutch oven, and I'll go back to the old times and the old partners."

"I will, papa," Gene said softly.

"Yes, yes, do, for they should not be forgotten. Hard cases; some, but honest and brave. Leave your sack of dust lying around anywhere; no danger that any one would touch it. Mountain fever got Arkansaw; Irish Dan went under a snowslide. But they were men, both of them. On the way to Bannock I took the fever, and Arkansaw refused to leave me, though every hour reduced his chance to get pay dirt. It meant the loss of thousands of dollars. Poor old Ark. He sleeps up there above the rip of the hydraulics, with the bunch grass growing over him; and Dan is under the hemlocks and the boulders, thirty feet below the surface."

While her father pursued his reminiscent train of thought, Gene put the victuals on the

table. Aunt Ruth came in, and the three took their places. Superintendent Truxton was very cheerful, and Gene was glad. The burden of business had fallen from him, and he reveled in the crisp, new beauty of the gloriously appareled mountains. She looked at his seamed, though still handsome, face, with its firm, kind mouth; and at his head, covered with iron-gray hair. But the touch of age seemed to have lifted from him, and something that was young had taken its place.

For an hour he lived in old memories of camp and trail, rehearsing trials and experiences Gene never had heard before, while the nard of pine and laurel floated through the open window. Leaving her father and Aunt Ruth to finish their meal at leisure, Gene went out under the trees, and stood looking down on the wind of the street, and the clean, blue swoon of the hills beyond. She tried to fathom the charm of it. In what did the spell consist? She could not tell; but already it was stealing over her; taking her in the witch-net which knows no breaking. How remote and unreachable the far heights seemed. Shoulder above shoulder they heaved themselves upward; cliff above cliff, they grew almost intangible in the turquoise air. The distant trees seemed suspended in pale mist. Never had she seen such sunshine. The touch of the

atmosphere was electric, sending the blood in wild riot through the body. With all the charm and wonder of it came a call, a pure passionate wish. If only she could melt into the dream of it and be lost. It was love—love without fear of pain or hate. The pines knew about it; the laurel knew the secret; the arrowwood blew snowy for some vast bridal. Down the flowered dells and grassy vistas came an irresistible wish, and Gene felt her soul rush to meet it. It was the joy of pure freedom, calling to her from cliff and peak. Something within her stirred. Potential passion, pure as its prompting element, burned unconsciously at the opal core of her being—burned there like diamond fire. In that moment she was born again. Now she must scale the heights, and thread the canyons to their deer-haunted nooks.

From the roadway came the clatter of ore-wagons, and she turned to watch them. Men were passing in the street; some with picks and shovels on their shoulders; others laden with rolls of blankets. Here and there nebulous clusters told where some topic of interest, or prospect of a fray, had drawn groups together. They also indicated the situation of the different saloons and dance-halls, in which the feverish games were forever at white heat.

Gene shuddered as she looked down on that

strange world, so far removed from her own. Any thought of ever penetrating those sin-haunted precincts was as far from her as an intention to leap into the sea.

As she gazed, there was a commotion among several of the groups. In an instant they had dissolved like mist; and where a moment before there had been many, now only two remained. Gene watched them draw apart; watched several births of blue smoke, and heard as many rattling reports go crashing among the listening cliffs. A street fight was in progress, and the contestants were settling their differences in the way of gentlemen. It was all over in a minute, and something limp was taken up from the street by several men; then the crowds gathered once more at the saloon fronts, and the hot heart of the camp beat on as before.

Gene did not fully grasp the meaning of what she had seen. Doubtless, it was but one feature of the raw wickedness which flaunted its scarlet signals on every hand.

A step caused her to turn, and she saw a tall young man before her, smiling and bowing, while he offered something of an apology for his interruption. Gene took him in at a glance. The smooth, pale face was full of a certain kind of agreeableness, and his eyes were better than the average. There was a shade of melancholy

about him which seemed to be partly assumed.

He removed his hat, revealing a good-enough head, covered with light hair, the upper thinness of which indicated early baldness. The stamp of his "calling" was on him. There was no mistaking him, he was the missionary.

"I hope my desire to spread the kingdom did not make me intrude before you were settled in housekeeping. But one must be up and doing, for the wolves will get in if the shepherd does not guard the flock, you know." He smiled, revealing a set of rather large teeth. Gene wondered what wolves he had fear of regarding her, but answered otherwise:

"We were quite in order by noon, and now are ready for callers."

"Then, I have not intruded; that is good, very good. You see, I am on the lookout for new arrivals in my field—my camp. I met Superintendent Truxton yesterday, and learned that you are here for the summer at least—" He paused reflectively. "I should have told you that I am the missionary to this whitened field. The assembly believed that there might be a few who could be won to the cause of our holy religion, so I gave up my prospects for advancement, surrendered my life to this very trying field, at least for a year. I hope you are in sympathy with the work."

"Perfectly," Gene replied, wondering, in an amused way, at the length of the consecration. "I should say there are many difficulties in such a place as this."

"It is indeed so. The saloon element is utterly beyond the power of religion. It seems that those who congregate there are utterly indifferent to every good impulse. I have made great effort to interest them; but it is impossible. You will understand the situation better when I tell you that only one man has celebrated the sacrament since my arrival."

"There have been women at the communion?"

"Yes, yes; and we have a very hopeful Sunday school. I dote on that."

"You have organized, then?"

"Yes, I found a score or so who were willing to unite, so I formed them into a society. They are really enthusiastic. Last week the ladies gave a banquet to the several superintendents, and the affair was most gratifying. The only hope of our work is to get the support of those of culture and means, you understand. Think of it, the wife of the owner of the Red Warrior mine is superintendent of the Sunday school. Isn't that nice? Her husband is very wealthy. Really, there seems to be an outlook for the faith here." The expression on the missionary's face

showed that he was well satisfied with his management of things.

At this moment Superintendent Truxton came out of the cabin.

"Ah, like a good pastor should, you are out seeking the lost sheep, I see. Gene, this is Doctor—er—"

"Conrad Morton," supplied the missionary, with a manifest pleasure in the resonance of the words.

"Yes, yes, that's it. Gene knows that forgetting names is my fault—among many"—winking at the missionary. "I suppose that you are acquainted by this time; if not, this is my daughter, Doctor Morton—did I get that right?"

The minister bowed low.

"I assumed as much. Really, there is a striking resemblance between father and child."

"Be careful, or Gene will be cross with you," laughed the superintendent.

"You dear old daddy; you know I always have been proud of that fact," Gene protested.

"Well, then, suppose I get offended—eh?"

"You may if you wish, there might be a cause for it. Papa is a born tease, and you will have to excuse him, or forgive him, as I do."

"You'll find this girl ready for any office, Doctor, for she is interested in religious work,

as you call it; I can bear witness to that, for she keeps me bankrupt begging for the different offerings; I know by that she is interested."

"So are you, papa. You would give out the idea that I have the faith of the family. Aunt Ruth would be wretched if she could not attend church, and really I like to go, I'm sure I do."

"We have a place for Miss Truxton now. Our organist is thinking of leaving, and she is unable to attend regularly, so there is a door for large good already open to you. You will accept, Miss Truxton?" He bent his glance upon her with an expression of certainty as to her answer. "Come," he insisted. "Folks find it impossible to resist my appeals; you must agree."

"But suppose I can't play—"

"But suppose that I happen to know you can, and that beautifully, Miss Truxton," he beamed.

"That's some more of papa's doings. Really, I should punish you soundly." Gene tangled her fingers in her father's beard, and pretended to administer a much-needed chastisement, while the missionary stood watching her, very well pleased with her goodly face and form. Yes, he would think about it; he would study her closely, for Conrad Morton must make no mistake in the choice of a wife.

Gene turned at the repetition of his question,

and caught the look of interest in his glance. "If there is anything I can do, in a quiet way, to help along, I don't mind doing it. But you must not count on me alone," she raised her hand and waved it toward the uplands, sleeping in filmy haze—"they call me, and I must go. When I am present, and there is no one else, then I will."

The missionary bowed. "Thank you," he said submissively, a note of disappointment in his voice, and a little self-assurance gone from his manner. "That can be attended to."

"You folks can fix matters. I have an appointment down in the camp. Come any time, and welcome, Doctor. God bless you, sir! God bless you!" With a wave of the hand, and a sly look at Gene, the old man went down the trail whistling.

"Do any of the miners attend your services, Doctor Morton?" Gene asked, a baffling look in her eyes.

"Very few of the ordinary pick-and-shovel men have been present. There is a ruling spirit of evil among them, a wild, reckless fellow, who seems to delight in insulting me—Borden, they call him. He came a few times, but I think only to find occasion for contempt. I am quite sure I could impress many of them if it were not for this man. I have taken great pains with my discourses, and have gone thoroughly into the

Greek text, so that I have been ready with much choice food which they would have enjoyed; but this fellow will not let them come to the table of the Lord. He is very strong; a thing, by the way, he is quite proud of; and he is given to desperate brawls in the saloons. I am told that when aroused he throws men bodily through the doors. It is perfectly terrible, for they say he takes great delight in their consternation and fright. I shudder when I meet him, for he seems to be waiting a chance to lay hands on me." The missionary looked his disgust, passed his hands in opposite directions from the perfect part of his hair, drew and unfolded a handkerchief, and passed it inside his collar and across his mouth, then returned it to the back pocket of his flowing coat.

"He must be a very wretched character," Gene assented, drawing the picture in her mind of a very disgusting person.

"There he is now," said the missionary, turning toward the trail, which followed the tiny ridge up to the saddle of the main divide. "He goes out of his way to insult me; but I will defeat his plans this time. Good-by, Miss Truxton. Remember, the music is to be in your hands—when it is possible. We have holy communion next Sabbath. I shall expect you, and hope you will—ah—be pleased with my preach-

ing." There was such a manner of certainty in this that Gene was convinced of the missionary's own belief that possibly she would be willing to be pleased.

She watched the tall, muscleless figure taking the grade of the hill with jolts and uncouth angularities. His long hands were open, and swinging aimlessly from the wrists.

"How does he strike you?" The words recalled her, and she turned toward Borden, who stood in the trail above her, the sharpened drills on his shoulder. There was a mocking smile on his lips, and good-natured banter in his eyes.

In spite of herself, Gene colored, and out of the tumult of her thoughts could frame no reply just then.

"I see you are quite favorably impressed. I knew you would be; I told you that yesterday. Nice coat he wears—eh? Makes me laugh every time I see it."

Gene resented the air of certainty with which he seemed to think his view of the case was the correct one. No matter what her private opinion might be, she recognized the right of the missionary to wear the kind of coat he wished, and to put white rose perfume on his handkerchief if he chose to do so. Besides, Aunt Ruth always had insisted that a minister should bear the stamp of his calling, and appear in the

most dignified manner possible. For a moment she was tempted to ignore the presence of the self-conceited man, who stood watching her with an amused light in his face. Then she recalled herself, lifted her glance to his, and met his steady glance with one as strong.

"At any rate, I think he is a gentleman," she said in a low voice.

A burst of chesty laughter greeted this bit of sarcasm. Though she was half angry, Gene recognized something masterful in it.

"So that is what society calls a gentleman, is it? Well, perhaps so, but it's a product worth very little among men. Guess I don't want to be one, if that is what the word means. Why, that chap goes through the camp with oiled hair, and wearing that confounded coat, which makes him look like the tall man at the circus, yet he expects to stand in with these miners who wear overalls and blue flannel shirts. Bah, I feel a contempt for such a make-up, and sometimes go out of my way to make him feel it."

"He told me you were in the habit of doing that."

Borden looked pleased. "Did he? Good! I want him to know it. Think of it! A miner was shot in a saloon row, and had to die, so we sent for this band-box chap to come up to the Elk Horn to see what he could do. Did he

come? Sure, but in that outlandish rig, smelling of white rose and lavender water. What did the boys do? Why, they poured several mugs of beer over the outfit, while they were getting the man on a table so the minister would not have to get down in the clutter. We thought he would have sense enough to wear a man's clothes after that, but it seems he has several of those outfits, for he immediately came out in another, but with a vow that he would attend no more funerals in a saloon. Since then we let them die, and then he puts them away very solemnly. All the women like him, though, and, of course, I knew you would. They are down there every Sunday singing psalms, and listening to his hog-wash, while better men stay in their cabins or shovel dirt against the commandment. I don't believe in religion, but, if there is such a thing, it is ten States from that chap, all right." As he finished, Borden's hand went mechanically to his pocket and drew forth a piece of tobacco. With the end of his finger he removed something objectionable from the place where he intended to set his teeth, drew the square across the side of his canvas overalls, and then removed a generous amount with a prying up-and-down motion.

The unconsciousness of the action amused Gene so much that she forgot her resentment of

a moment ago, and, with eyes that danced, asked, "Does the missionary use tobacco?"

Borden looked vexed, then he laughed. Taking the tobacco from his mouth, he threw it into the laurel.

"It's a worthless habit—as all habits are, and I answer the demand without the use of my wits. I am quite sure the preacher does not use it. It takes a man to make a success of a thing like that." Borden could not resist the temptation for one more fling at the object of his contempt.

"You consider yourself quite a man, then?"

"I try to keep my end up in everything that requires iron," he replied almost impatiently.

"Even to throwing men out of the saloons, bodily, and upsetting the furniture in the dance-halls?"

"I see that animated sapling has been giving you my history. Tell him to stick to his psalms and Greek, or I'll dip his sallow head in the creek."

Borden was angry. It was Gene's turn to laugh, and she did, the clear music of it echoing along the glade. He looked at her keenly for a moment, relaxed, and shared in her mirth. In that glance his eyes were opened. She was different from the other women he had known. The wife of the man in charge of the

Lucky Boy mine had shown a willingness to flirt with him; the unmarried girls of the place were quite easy to obtain—even for the asking; the creatures who frequented the dance-halls—bah, they were not to be given a thought. But this girl was not as any of these. At first he had taken his estimate of her from those he had met, but now he saw that it was necessary for him to make a new adjustment. Not that he did not make a difference, but those women who had come in contact with his life he had found so perfectly human, so much after a common order, that he very naturally put them together in one class. For the married women he had felt contempt; for the girls of the town, a passing amusement; for the creatures in the dance-halls, something that was like pity. Wild, stormy in his blasphemy, and given to a free fight as a turtle to the mud, yet he had been the mystery to his more Bohemian companions, for with bluff temper he had cursed down every suggestion of impurity which any aspiring spirit of evil dared to suggest.

“To h—l with you! A man’s got to draw the line somewhere, and that’s the place for me,” was his customary way of getting rid of the troubling seducer.

But this girl, standing clean as a nymph under the pines, belonged to none of these.

There was that about her which reminded him of twilight. She was like an embodiment from the whisper in the canary grass. For a time he stood watching her with eyes into which visions were coming. Suddenly he was aware that he had seen this girl just as she was in her own atmosphere. He had been in the habit of thinking of women as a class, and not as individuals. This woman was individual. He found himself interested, and with the consciousness came a feeling of rebellion.

"Did you remember your promise?" he asked, wishing to change the trend of his thoughts.

"What promise?"

"Forgot it already, I see. Perhaps you think I'm not worth it—and I guess I'm not."

"You speak of what was said about prayer?"

"Yes."

"I remembered you," she answered, coloring a little under his steady gaze.

"Guess you better not waste your time on me. The chap who was talking to you a moment ago can have my portion."

"But you certainly need it, for your life is very wicked, according to your own account," she replied firmly.

At this he whistled shrilly, then he laughed in the dashing, unrestrained way which was his.

"Do you think so?" he blurted, very much amused.

"No, I am certain of it," she replied quietly.

"Well, then, go ahead, and here's good luck to you."

He threw the drills to his shoulder, and, with a little wave of his hand, swung up the trail. Gene watched till a fringe of mountain cherry hid him from sight. There was about him an element of fitness which challenged admiration. She was possessed of a feeling that in him great elements for good were being perverted. That, with all his frankness of manner and speech, he yet was one to be trusted. With a sigh she sank upon a tuft of pine grass and remained a long time looking dreamily at the brothering ranges.

III

THE COMING OF MOODS

WITH no sense of weariness, Borden swung up the trail to the mine which he owned jointly with James Kelly, the rollicking Irish blade, who cheered the camp with his wit and songs.

His thoughts were in a tumult, and he found it impossible to laugh away the recollection of the strange girl who had dared to call him a sinner. That was new; he was not used to it, and it made him half angry. In his heat, he made all manner of comparisons and conjectures regarding her, always with one returning certainty—she was different. It did not occur to him that some of this might be accounted for in her religion, and, had he thought of it, he would have rejected it with an oath. She was different from other women exactly as the hemlocks were different from the oaks, and the aspen from the pine. That was all.

When he reached the mouth of the tunnel, he threw down the drills, and, removing his hat, stood looking into it, seeing the breeze-blown

hair and face of Gene Truxton. A half-hour later he went into the tunnel and tried to work, but, after striking a drill for an hour, he threw it aside, filled the car with rock, and pushed it to the dump. With a kick he drove out the pin and sent the fragments rolling down the slope. Then, climbing well up the face of the mountain, over which the June sun fell like powdered gold, he threw himself at full length in the grass. His glance ranged languidly over the tumbled stretches of ridges and canyons.

Deep in the gray troughs of the upper range lay irregular patches of snow. There it would shimmer till the storms came again. Out of these treasuries of the winter the white waters came dancing through the valleys. There were glorious blue lakes up there, walled in by splintered cliffs. About these bright surprises clung a haunting beauty. There the wild goats came to drink. Borden lay sensing the dream-drench and power of it all. Far below, at the bottom of the gulch, a cluster of willows and cherry indicated the presence of a spring, which seemed to be the "thank you" of the verbiage to the "welcome" of the water. A mother grouse led her brood close by where he lay, repeating endlessly a low love note, picking at the blades of grass, and pursuing choice grasshoppers for dessert. Over the land lay a maddening some-

thing, personified, yet abstract. It is this nameless power, this transcendent charm, vaguely real, yet unapproachable, which dominates every spirit which passes behind the enchanted veil.

The greasewood was in bloom, and the odor of it lay cloy on the air. Borden broke a spray of piute flower, and looked intently at the crimson leaves. The Indian maidens had decked their black hair with it in their willow bridals. He would read the riddle of its flowers. The red stood for love—that was enough—he laughed, and the wind snatched it up and took it to the pines, and the pines sighed over his mood. He repeatedly went over all she had said to him. Sometimes he was angry; again, he was amused. Then, being a conceited man, he purposed to teach the lady a lesson. Again he grew thoughtful. In the end, he did what it would be impossible for such a nature not to do, he cast his entire ballot for the girl who had had the courage to tell him his faults; and who, strange to say, had been able easily to withstand the force of his good looks. In her clear eyes he had read a strength of character which utterly discounted every point on which he had depended for a standing among the fair ones of the camp. This was not pleasant, for they were all he had, and he found now that

he wished to be on good terms with this girl. He was like a wild horse taken in a loop. Without reasoning it out, Borden knew that a duel was on between them. Such was his nature that he could leave no battlefield till he had made the last possible effort to win. In this case somebody must surrender, and he was determined it would not be his flag that should be hauled down first. Cherokee Smith had come to Deadman, confident in his ability to overmatch any man in the camp; he met Borden and left him with humbled crest, for he had been thrown completely over the bar in the Lone Pine Saloon. Came Solo Moore, who had the advantage of reach and weight, but he went down before the swift-handed miner. Hans, the Swede, and Billy, the puncher, fared no better. But now Borden was forced to own that he fought at a disadvantage, for no blow he could strike at astral eyes, and a face with the pure seeming of flowers in it, would avail, seeing that he must wage a war of words with the actions of a gentleman. At the end of an hour it had been voted a draw when he fought Irish Conally; but Borden remembered with a grim smile that he had been perfectly fit for the tunnel the next day, while his enemy had been compelled to miss ten shifts. But he was vaguely conscious that the fight which he had taken upon

himself now was more difficult than any of those in which he had been engaged. Conally had refused utterly to meet his antagonist for a finish contest, but every swift glance of Gene Truxton's eyes was a challenge—a challenge he must answer. The element of contest was a strong ingredient in Borden's nature. Till now it had been easy: fight his man; whip him; take a drink. That had been his element.

Suddenly he thought of the missionary, and the old dislike stirred within him. Long ago, he told himself, he would have given him a taste of rough house, had it not been for the fact that it would appear like applying the rules of boxing to a cradle-roll, yet he was tempted to proceed anyway. Was not the missionary the nearest thing to Gene Truxton he could fight?

Springing up, he walked to the edge of the ridge, and looked down where the Truxton cabin stood; but he saw only a thin smear of smoke wasting among the trees. He was interested even in that.

Returning that evening through the shadows which made witch-maps on the world, Borden felt as never before that life was good and worth living. Jim met him in the door and looked him over curiously.

"I say, Bord, you look like you'd found a

ledge of free milling ore, and wire gold at that—eh? What's the luck?"

"You know I never went two bits on luck, Jim," Borden replied, pushing past his partner and entering the cabin.

"I understand! Well, perhaps you'd be glad to know we have neighbors? We have. Old miner—rich, I take it—has moved into the cabin where Tex and Bug Juice Hubbard held out. But I swear you wouldn't know the joint; it's like the front of a gambler's shirt. Why, they have a tablecloth on the table and papers on the shelves. I tell you, Bord, it looks good to this Irishman. Take a peek for yourself some day when you are up there."

"Seen Frisky?" Borden broke off, referring to a chipmunk which had become so tame it would eat out of his hand.

"He was here awhile ago. I chased the little beast out of the cabin for stealing dried apples. I can't see the point in feeding that commodity to squirrels at twenty cents a pound. Pretty blooded for a chipmunk, it strikes me."

"That's so, Jim; but it would be mighty lonesome without the little thief, just the same. How about supper?"

"On the way. Beans are done, and the bread getting brown in the Dutch oven."

Jim went diligently over the different pots,

lifting the lids and noting the progress of the simmering victuals, dropping a half-cup of cold water into the coffee to settle it. After that it was set back to wait for the other things. Then he took a banjo and began to sing in good voice a bit of doggerel:

"There's old lame Jess was a hard old case,
He never would repent;
He never missed a single meal,
And he never paid a cent.

"Yet my heart is filled with the days of yore,
And oft do I repine
For the days of old, the days of gold,
The days of Forty-nine."

"Oh, sing something worth listening to, can't you?" growled Borden.

Jim looked up with a little surprise.

"What's struck you, pard? That's a classic, can't you understand? It's a gem. The man who wrote it struck bed-rock and emptied out his soul."

"Yes, *his* soul," Borden emphasized.

"How'd this suit you—?" Jim twanged the strings and began:

"Come, all ye overland drivers
Bound on the overland.
To each and every one of you
I give the parting hand.
For I'm going to leave this bleak, cold West,
This wild and stormy plain,
Where the Indian's arrow leaves you
Ne'er to return again."

There was much more of the same quality, ending with:

"And from the girl that I love best
I'll never roam again.
'Twas there, her blue eyes filled with tears,
She told me she'd be mine:
My heart is true as yet to her,
My love will never die."

"That's better," Borden commented conclusively, putting tin dishes on the table.

"Glad you like it, pard. While you set things on, I'll just clip off a bit of my favorite," whereupon Jim launched into a lost romance living only in a few lines of rhyme:

"I'll build you a castle
In some pleasant town,
Where dukes, lords nor nobles
Can ne'er break it down.
And if any one asks you
How you came to roam,
Just tell them you're a strange girl
And far from your home."

"Junk's ready!" Borden broke in, whirling two home-made chairs up to the table.

"So am I," Jim assented, throwing the banjo on one of the bunks, and setting upon the food in a way which did ample justice to his robust health and twenty-five years.

After a long silence, Jim broke it with:

"I say, pard, what the old boy 's the matter with you, anyway? You act like you were contemplating suicide, had struck a mine, or

seen a ghost. Or is it marriage? Here I am spilling over like a sluice-box, with good nature, while you act like you'd signed the pledge, or some one had told what they know about you, which would be enough to make you blue, I'll agree. Thaw out before I break a shovel over you."

Borden laughed. "Don't you think it. When I sign the pledge it will be a cold day—plenty of frost—hear me?"

"But about the neighbors, Bord. You know it is good manners for the first families to visit the newcomers; and that means that we must call upon them."

"What do you know about good manners, you freckle-faced gilly?" Borden bantered. "You might tell a mint julep from raw gin, or a potato from a squash, but good breeding—forget it!"

"Never mind about my manners, Bord. I've had my feet under many a table where we picked our goose with silver forks, and had a choice of meat. Don't go and get notions about my manners, old man."

"Exactly. But about this visiting business. If one bunch calls on another, that means the other bunch must return the call, don't it?"

"Which bunch?"

"Shut up, you Irish swine, you know which

bunch. It would mean that we would be on the pay-roll for a visit, and that you would doubtless have to get in and cook a meal. How would you like that?"

"Fine!" Jim welcomed the idea. "I'll show them what a miner can do in the line of grub if they show up."

"Beans and bacon are a little coarse for women just from the East," suggested Borden.

"Never you mind about that. I'll show them something besides bacon and beans if they come, and you keep your paws off the whole business—understand?"

"Don't worry about that, Jim. I'll talk religion—that is, I'll argue it—with the girl, while you fix the pudding. But mind you, don't come putting your speckled nose in where you might get it broke—get me?"

"You forget about the Chipmunk."

"Which, Frisky?"

"Oh, hang Frisky! I mean The Color."

"There's more than you interested in her, Jim; and I might as well tell you I've been looking that way myself. Never did think you had her anchored very solid."

Jim flared up with true Irish temper. "Confound you, Borden! You go bothering around that girl and I'll blow you off the world with dynamite."

Borden roared at this, and Jim relapsed instantly into a happy frame of mind.

Twilight fell tenderly over the dream-haunted valley. Dark deepened on glade and hill, and the candid June stars came out in a velvet sky. Ground-owls piped their two haunted notes from elfin distance. Borden sat outside watching the moon creep down the peaks, a pure white mist. Inside, Jim was singing:

“The daughters of Erin are famed the world over,
For wit and for beauty, for charms all their own.
But there’s one in the land of the shamrock and clover
Who is first of the first and second to none.”

Vaguely, Borden listened to the voice of his light-hearted partner. The words came to him indistinctly, like a whisper in the hemlocks. A light flashed against the misty wall of the half-night. Borden smiled at the next train of thought which it started, for the gleam came from the Truxton cabin.

IV

THE COLOR

GENE TRUXTON'S first Sabbath in Dead-man was a mildly pleasant one. She had listened to a discourse from Conrad Morton, delivered in a very complacent manner. It indicated at least a reasonable knowledge of Greek. Evidently, the degree had been bestowed on one who had some claim to it.

She had been well schooled in that sort of charity, longsuffering on occasion, which sees in a minister not so much a man as the thing which he represents. This had redeemed many uninteresting services for her, and had covered unbelievable lapses from ministerial character with the veil of forgetfulness. By a simple turn of reasoning, she had found something even in these failures to strengthen her faith, for did not the work of the Nazarene survive all scandals?

But for once she felt a sense of weariness during the service, and was glad when it was over. The missionary had seemed at his best, however, and rendered his text, first in English

then in Latin, and later in Greek, with many glances of assurance toward his fair listener. Notwithstanding this, Gene found it impossible to keep her thoughts from wandering. The blue mountains invited her through the open window, their misty summits seeming heaven-distant in the pale mist which wrapped them. How the folded uplands, with their unwalked dells and varieties of wild flowers, seemed to call to her, to stretch to her hands of mysterious power. She rebuked herself for this mood, shook it from her, and struggled to become interested, but always with the same result.

A soft wind, cool and fragrant, came down the canyon. With a leap it crossed the window-ledge and kissed her cheek like a daring lover.

In this frame, she drifted from the discourse, left the expounder at his most agreeable period of profound comparisons, and gave her fancy wings, passed into the dreamy remoteness of nature; far Elfland horns were blowing, and they were sweet.

She was recalled by the rustle of starched clothing—the dozen and a half congregation was arising for the benediction. A moment later, Conrad Morton was before her, bowing low, with an air of satisfaction with himself which did not escape her. As she left the house, Gene thought of Borden. He had said

that he went only once to hear the missionary. She smiled as she pictured him enduring the dry hour, his stormy nature panting for the open and action.

With a feeling of relief, she followed the path which wound away from the town through mysterious little nooks and shadowy glades, past laurel vistas, and over flashing streams. As she drew near Borden's cabin, she saw him swing into the trail and move off toward the mine. Gene felt something akin to pity for the forgetter of the day. He smiled and waved her a frank greeting.

"Been to hear him, have you? Did he feed you on Greek?"

"He told what it meant in the original," she replied.

"I'd rather pay a cougar to screech in the canyon."

"Possibly. Every one to his taste, you know."

He laughed buoyantly. "So it seems to you, I suppose. But I can't stay with it. I tried and had to give it up. That fellow gets me. I can't go him a little bit."

"This is the third time you have assured me of that fact."

He bowed aggravatingly. "I am well aware of it. The only reason it has not been more

was lack of opportunity. Your idea that religion consists in enduring such torture needs an antidote. I feared that the good impression he was making on you might prove too much."

"Give yourself no unnecessary concern on that point," she flashed, smiling, though her words carried something of resentment.

"Would you, a strict church-member, quarrel on Sunday?" He was enjoying the tilt.

"Nothing is farther from my mind. It is unworthy of discussion. But what of your willful disregard of the commandment? Certainly, Mr. Borden, you can do all that is required in the week-days, without intruding on time which is not yours."

"All days are alike to me," he replied doggedly. "The grass does not stop growing because it is Sunday; nor do the streams quit flowing—why should I stagnate a seventh of the time?"

"You should rate yourself above the grass and the water—certainly you recognize a difference?"

"Yes, I fight and swear and drink—at times. There's that difference. I suppose you think that is enough?"

"Plenty," she condensed.

"That'll do to quit on. Jim will think I've gone to church if I don't show up at the mine.

By the way, he says it is proper for the old resident families to call on the newcomers, so you may expect us up some of these times. Jim and I are very anxious to observe all the amenities, you understand. Adios."

With the Spanish termination of the talk, Borden went up the trail, leaving the girl half angry. He was so sure of himself, so conceited, that she always kindled when he bantered her.

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The week was half gone. It was a mild June morning. Gene left the cabin and strolled through the aspen groves, where the grouse were merry at their seed-picking, and the piute flower flamed crimson.

She raised her eyes to the splintered peaks, with a little cry of joy.

"They are mine—all mine! Woods, canyons, wild things, mystery—mine!" She caught her breath with a passionate intake, and her bosom heaved with emotion. For some moments she stood rapt and listening. Sounds which only the soul can hear were coming to her; witch voices, pitched to a key which her heart knew. Once more she moved on. Her way brought her to an open slope. There a hopeful prospector had cut the strata in search of some believed-in ledge. The dirt and stones were "dumped" at the end of the tunnel.

As she neared this mound of earth, Gene paused, for seated upon it was a girl, her hands lying idly in her lap. Her eyes were raised to the far-off hills. Her hair, which was like burnt umber, fell in a rather graceful tumult about her face. She started up as Gene approached. Slowly the look of wonder passed, and one of understanding took its place.

"Oh, dear! how you scared me. But I know who you are now—you're the new lady in the Old Tex cabin, ain't you?"

"Yes," Gene replied, not just sure of her own identification. "I have been there only a week or so."

"Do you like it?" the elf went on, peering at Gene curiously.

"Very much. It is all so beautiful, so wonderful!"

"I am glad to hear you say that, for I love it—love it!" The girl pressed her hands over her heart and turned toward the summit.

"Have you been here very long?"

The girl recalled herself. "I was born here. I've never known anything else. Up there the fawns are born—well, I'm like that. My father was killed by a blast, and I've just growed up wild-like, here among the pines."

"Where is your mother, child?" Gene asked the question with that anxiety which a traveled

person feels for one who has had small chance to interpret the meaning of life.

"My mother? Dead, too, they say. I never saw her. Wish I had, for I've been awful lonesome, sometimes. That's why I love the hills. When I get them feelings, I run away to the wild places and talk to the deer and the grouse, and everything seems to understand; only, they seem to be lonesome too."

"Where do you live, dear?" Gene asked kindly.

The piquant eyes were full of discontent.

"I stay with my father's old partner, and his wife. They do the best they can, I guess, but old Sluicy drinks—drinks; and they don't understand that I want to learn things, like other girls way out in the big world beyond the mountains. I want to know about the great cities and the sea. Oh, that is all so wonderful! Jim has told me about it. He's seen it, but I hain't. But I love the dear old hills, and I never want to leave them and not come back. It just seems they understand all about me, and I tell them lots of funny things when I feel queer. But I want to know about books and music, like you do, and others. You know lots about them, don't you?"

"Not as much as some, though I have read a great deal, child."

"So has Jim and Borden, but I can't read only a little."

"Who is Jim, dear?"

"Jim? Don't you know? He lives close by you. He's Borden's partner."

"Is he good?"

"Oh, so good! If it wasn't for him, I don't know what I'd do. I suppose folks who go to church would call him bad, because he swears sometimes, and goes to the saloons; but he's fine to me, and get me things; 'cause old Sluicy drinks, and never has any money. Not only that, but he makes the miners quit teasing me; and once he thrashed a fellow who tried to act smart."

"Do the miners tease you?"

"They used to, but not so much now. When I was little they would call me Reddy, and Brick-top, and then I'd cry. Sometimes they called me Patterfoot, 'cause I didn't have any shoes. But they named me The Color the most, cause of my hair. Jim said that was all right, for the color in the pan means pay dirt in the mines, and he said I was gold, all right. But he calls me Chipmunk most, 'cause I us't to run up and down the logs so much."

"But what is your real name, the name your—father called you?"

"Oh, my really name is Gertrude. That was

my mother's name, I guess. I never saw her, though. She died a long time ago, when I was wee little. That was when the camp was new, and there was only one mill; now there's lots of them."

"Have you ever gone to school?"

The girl's eyes sought the ground. "Only a few months, and I'm sixteen now. I don't know very much about anything, I guess. I see other girls who can talk nice, and they play music, and I wish I could be like them. Do you think I could learn?" There was an eager light in the pleading eyes.

"Certainly. All you need is a chance. But hasn't there been a schoolteacher here?"

"Yes, but old Sluicy thought I ought to stay at home and work, 'cause they keep boarders to make a living. That's the way it's been; but I feel sorry for Sluicy's wife, 'cause she has to work so hard. I'd like to learn to sing—and I could, but I don't know how. But you can sing, can't you?"

"A little, child."

"And play music—?"

"Yes."

"Oh, that's wonderful! How I wish I could do that. Once I touched the keys of a piano, and it almost frightened me. Does it take a long time to learn?"

“Not so long as you think, perhaps. It depends on how hard you work at it.”

“Oh, I’d work hard, if I had the chance.”

Gene looked deep into the candid eyes, shadowy with nature’s questionings, and her own grew moist. As one sees far objects take form and place through a lifting haze, she glimpsed in that moment an opportunity. Here was a chance to unlock a prisoned soul. Never before did service appear so beautiful, or unselfishness an angel of so white a robe. The clean hands of mercy beckoned; the brows of truth and trust were bound with clasps of sapphire. In that moment Gene saw as never before the eternal separation between matter and spirit. The streams had voices; the pines dropped their cones; the aspens sent forth vital roots; but always the measure was the same. Their circles were small. The grass grew no higher this year than last. The thickets died and grew again; the hemlocks were only equal to other hemlocks. But the soul was not like that. Here was a harp with uncounted strings, a music with scales of its own. After all, the whisper was not in the larches, nor the wistful sorrow in the pines; it was in the heart. The crash of the storms, the trumpets of the loosened forces were the high notes of the breast, sounding for loftier marshalings in the Infinite.

Gene looked down the vistas of the girl's nature, and saw the buds of struggling truth and longing burst forth in power, as the syringas had done at the asking of the sun. What a privilege to send the spirit abroad, free and fair. Her thoughts must have trooped to her glance, for, when she recalled herself, the girl was looking at her with a mystified expression.

"Oh, your eyes are just lovely! You look like a spirit, I know," the girl commented in the blunt frankness of youth. "Whatever was you thinking about? It must have been something like love, for you looked so kind. But no one ever loved me, I guess, except Jim; he does, I suppose. Was it like that, you was thinking about—like love?"

Tears gathered in Gene's eyes.

"Yes, dear child, it was love made me look that way."

"Isn't it wonderful to love some one? Who is it?"

Gene put her arms around the girl's shoulders, and drew her gently toward her: "It is you, dear—you, that I love!"

A cry of joy greeted the words. Then the girl drew back unbelieving and shy.

"Me? Me? Why do you love me?"

"Just because I do, dear, and I want your

love in return. You are lonely, and heart-hungry. You were made to be loved."

The girl nestled in Gene's arms with a little sigh of content. Then she looked up shyly and asked:

"How could you love me? You never saw me before."

"It all came in a moment, and I'm glad, for I never had a sister. How I have wished for that companionship all through my life."

"Oh, let me be your sister, your own sister! Please do!" pleaded the girl.

Gene raised the sun-browned face and kissed the high forehead tenderly.

"You shall be my sister, child, and that seals it."

"No one ever kissed me before," murmured the girl, her cheek on Gene's breast.

"I will kiss you every day, dear, from now on, for you are to be my companion, you know."

The girl looked up with a new light in her eyes. "Oh, isn't love wonderful? I never was so happy before. You are so beautiful and good. And to think you would have any time for me. I'm only a waif of the camp. I've played in the street, and run in and out of the saloons when I was little. But I was always hungry for something, and now I know it was love. I wanted that, and now it has come."

Gene held the strong young body close to her and looked down into the candid eyes. Into them never had come the shadows of impurity. In that moment a new estimate for the shaggy miners was formed in her mind.

"I want to talk to you of other things now. Let us sit down and plan a bit. I want you to know music, and how to write and sing and read books. Will you let me teach you? I have a piano, and we can arrange that nicely."

A prolonged exclamation of surprise greeted this statement. In it there were agreement and unbounded delight.

"There is a little cabin close to the one I live in. We can fix that up and have a little school all our own. Won't that be lovely?"

"You're an angel!" the girl cried excitedly. "I knew you was good the minute I looked at you. Oh, how sweet you are!"

"It's nothing, child, nothing," Gene protested. "I shall be glad to help you, and I know you will learn rapidly. We will look into cooking, and learn how to make dresses. But you will have to get Jim to make some windows so we can have more light. Do you think he will do it?"

"Do it! He'll do anything I want him to," the girl replied confidently.

"Then come up to-morrow and we will

arrange it. Now I must go, or Aunt Ruth will think the Old Man of the Hills has carried me off."

Together the two girls, one in tender sixteen, the other in steady twenty, went up through the aspen groves, where the mariposa lilies cupped the aisles of the forest, while pines whispered over them, and the chokecherry touched them with soft green hands.

V

THE OLD POWDER CABIN

THE night wind was still in the pines when Gene Truxton arose the morning after meeting The Color.

There was a delicious suggestion of life in the bunch grass. In the glades the piute flower and the purple bell made high notes in the general green. All growing things were fresh washed at the fountains of the night.

She went out under the reddening east and stood with lifted face, taking the crisp air with eyes like rare wine full of banked fires. Gene wondered what passion, what ravishing wish was back of the flooding glory of the sky. It was like the face of a woman—a woman that is pure.

She walked to the rim of the ridge and looked down into the huddled hollows where the glooms still lay. From everywhere came the chatter of waters, fluting over pebbles and tiny falls. An aspen—a tremble of wonder and beauty—stirred, quivered to its utmost twig, and filled itself with sighs. With rapt gaze she

watched the unfolding miracle about her. Now the peaks were capped with gold; then the lesser ridges began to flame, and soon the upper forests were a conflagration. The shadows leaped out of the canyons and fled. Two deer, in soft red dress, tripped from a glade and vanished in the laurel thickets. An hour passed. The sun had reached the valley and was idealizing the crude cabins squatted here and there among the firs. Gene saw, too, that it was falling in equal glory on the saloons, dance-halls and unkept street.

"Am I late?"

The Color came to Gene's side, her eyes alight with expectancy. She wore an old house-dress, and her hair was gathered about her head in a pretty tumult.

"No, dear, you are not late. I got up early so I could see the sun rise, and the grouse getting their breakfast in the grass. Many a sleepy grasshopper has gone to make a side-dish, I assure you. You are ready for business, I see."

"Yes, I just long to get at it. I'll do all the hard things, and you can be boss and order me around. Jim said he'd come up and cut out the windows in a little while. Oh, I'm so happy—happy!" The girl paused and looked at her companion intently for a moment, then turned to enter the cabin.

"I must keep my promise, unless you object," said Gene, drawing the shy creature to her and imprinting a kiss on her forehead.

"I wondered . . . I thought you had forgotten. Oh, it's splendid to be loved!" The girl nestled like a startled fawn in the arms which held her. Suddenly, with a little laugh, she disengaged herself.

"We must get to work. There's an awful clutter in the cabin, and Jim will be here pretty soon to sweep out." The girl hurried away in the direction of the hut.

The rubbish consisted in a great quantity of broken picks and wornout shovels, old cans which had held powder, and heaps of worthless boots. There were battered sledges, also, and splintered drills. Mouldy clothes filled the corners, and coils of fuse hung from pegs in the walls. Gene looked at the confusion in dismay. The Color broke into rippling laughter, then began to throw whatever her hands touched, through the door.

"Hadn't you better wait till he—he comes? You'll cut your hands on those rusty edges."

"That don't matter," the girl chirruped, gathering an armload of drills which left their rust on her hands and arms. "I'd do anything to be like you, and learn what I want to know."

"But you must just be yourself, dear, after

all. You know the forest trees are different. The pine can not be a fir, nor the larch a hemlock. All these have their own forms, and we are glad, for we would not want to change the beautiful aspen into the cottonwood, nor the cherry to the oak."

"That's so," the girl agreed, a wondering light in her eyes. Then she brightened. "I am glad you said that. That means that I can be somebody, too, don't it? And, while I know the same things, still I'll be different, won't I?"

"That is it, child," Gene encouraged.

A half-hour later, a cheery voice accosted them from the door, and The Color assured her that Jim had come to help them. Gene saw a clear-eyed young man before her, his hat on the back of his head, and his tumult of hair in a brush about his face. "A man to trust," thought Gene, meeting the eyes which searched her face.

"Oh, Jim! this is the woman I told you about. Her name's Truxton. She's going to learn me lots of things, and this is to be our schoolhouse. Won't it be nice? I'm going to work hard—hard!" There was something cultured in the bow with which the young man acknowledged the introduction.

"The Color has been telling me that you are going to help her out on some things. This

is very kind of you. I have wanted to do it myself, but—well, that wouldn't look just right, I suppose. But I know she will get on all right."

Before Gene could reply, The Color broke in:

"That will do now. We want these cans and things dumped into that old shaft down there. I'll throw them out to you."

Jim dodged a powder keg, and went down the hill with his arms full, to the ripple of the girl's laughter.

"She's a perfect little heathen, and a tyrant," Jim protested to Gene on his return. "I have to step high and look close when she takes the sledge and begins to strike. You understand that, don't you?"

"I fear not, Mr. —"

"Kelly," supplied Jim.

"Well, I'll tell you. You see, the ledge lies like butter between two slices of bread, in the other rock. This comes to the surface, and dips deep into the hill. If we believe it good, we go below and drift in so we can tap it at the heart of the mountain. By doing this, we learn if it is worth bothering with. When we get into the hill a bit we strike rock, and we have to blast it out with powder. This is done by striking a turning drill with a sledge till a hole

is made, into which we put the powder, then we set it off with a fuse and cap, and that tears out a hole. So we go on through the mountain. One holds the drill, the other strikes it."

"There's two loads of cans out there waiting," the girl interrupted.

Jim obeyed her suggestion immediately, and they heard him singing as he went down the hill:

"The daughters of Erin are famed the world over,
For wit and for beauty, for charms of their own.
But there's one in the land of the shamrock and clover
Who is first of the first and second to none."

"I like the other part of that best—you know," The Color suggested on his return. A moment later they heard the glades answering to:

"She can boast not of riches,
Of rank, nor of station.
This dear little colleen, she loves me, I know.
But I'd love her no more
Were she queen of a nation—
She's my Irish lass from the county Mayo."

"Is that all of it?" Gene asked, struck by the simple ballad.

"No, there's a chorus that goes with it. I like that." The Color waited. She was sure that she had given ample reason for the rest of the song being sung. Jim thought so, too, for he began at once:

"As pure as the dewdrop
That falls on the heather—
Our hearts bound together
By love's shining tether,
She's my Irish lass from the county Mayo."

"I like that best," said Gene, underscoring the thought.

"We are ready for the windows now; and while you make them I'll sweep."

The girl seized an old broom and began to push out the smaller clutter.

"I'll do that. You have done most of the hard things this morning," said Gene, trying to take the broom.

"I ought to, for it's me who is to get the benefit." Gene insisted, but the girl stood firm.

Meantime, Jim had made an opening and was drifting through the logs with a saw. While he worked he talked. The free spirit of the camp characterized all he did. Gene was coming to see that the men of the trail and pass were all one in this quality, and—she liked it.

"It's mighty kind of you, Miss Truxton, to help The Color out this way. She's always wanted to know music and books. But old Sluicy is a wreck from alcohol, so he couldn't give her a chance. He was a man once, but drink got him, and it's got him now. What makes me want to fight is the fact that the girl here, and his wife, have to suffer with him. The

old woman has been keeping boarders, and that meant no chance for school. I have done what I could to make it lighter for her, but that's the case. 'Tain't because she ain't smart, and all that. I wanted her to know these things, because—you see—I—am interested. But there are only a few pianos in camp, outside a saloon, and the women who own them are the stuck-up folks who wouldn't want the girl hammering on them."

"It will be a great pleasure to help her in these matters, Mr. Kelly, and I am sure we will get on nicely; won't we, girlie?"

"Of course we will! I just love you now, and I've only knowed you a little. What will it be when I've knowed you a lot?" The girl drew her hand across her forehead, leaving streaks of dust.

"Wonder if you'd think it queer if Borden and me would ask you folks all down to our cabin some time? I told him the old-timers were to call on the newcomers, and that would mean that you would have to come down. You see, Miss Truxton, I was well enough raised, but it's easy to forget in a place like this."

"What did he say to that?" Gene asked, her cheeks taking a pale carnation.

"Who, Borden? Oh, he thought it was all right; but he told me I'd have to come along

with the cooking—see? But that don't need to bother anybody, for I know how to do that myself." There was conscious pride in the statement.

Gene thought: "Could I eat a man's cooking?" Then aloud: "We shall be pleased to have you and Mr. Borden call. My father is an old miner, and doubtless you will enjoy trading experiences."

"We're coming, all right, and that means that you must visit us. There! That log is out. At first Borden laughed, then he didn't object. Borden's a variety all his own. He ain't like other men. I believe he'd get a gulchful of fun out of fighting a grizzly with a club. Sometimes he cleans out the saloons just to see the chaps go with the breeze. I never saw such strength and energy. Usually his eyes are like the light you see on the hills, but when he is in another mood they look like banked fires. I honestly think he's the best-looking fellow in the world. And, after being his partner for four years, I think he's the best man I ever knew. Honest as gold, and not a small thing in him! But he seems to be unable to live without excitement. He drinks some, that's true, but not like the rest; and he swears. You'd think he'd want his own way in everything, but he don't. There's a woman streak in

him that gives in, unless you try to drive him; then look out! But there's something else that is like a storm. It make him glorious, but a bad enemy. I've seen him feeding a pet chipmunk out of his hand and calling him all manner of pet names; and I've seen him throwing crumbs on the snow for the birds in winter, till they'd come down out of the pines every time he went out. That's one side. Then I've watched him laughing at a pistol barrel held an inch from his face. When he'd had enough, the fellow found himself in a corner and his gun gone. That's Borden. Now I'll put in the window."

"No, no, leave it out; we want the air to come in, and the nard of the trees," Gene objected, glad for a chance to turn from the interesting train of conversation, though she had weighed every word of the description. "The butterflies, and the sound in the pines, and the chatter of the white waters down there, will all be good to see and hear."

The tasks were done at last. Jim had gone whistling down the trail, leaving the two women to survey the purged cabin with great satisfaction. At that moment a chipmunk darted through the door and up the logs to the window ledge, where it sat up to eat something in its tiny claws. Gene stared at it in astonishment,

for it had a small, blue ribbon around its neck.

"Oh, that's Borden's pet. It's gentle as can be. Jim says it will eat out of one's hand. Let me see if I can catch it."

Sure enough, the little creature manifested no fear as the girl approached, permitting her to stroke its striped body. Spying a member of its kind, it gave shrill chase out of the window and up a dead pine. The girl watched it a moment thoughtfully.

"Strange that a man who likes to fight and swear, like Borden, would take up with a chipmunk, ain't it? He's not like others, though. Jim told the truth. Sometimes he's like a poet—you know—like a poet. Spends days at a time in the wild places, and he won't do any mean things, only throw men out of places when they ought to be. But I wonder why he likes that chipmunk."

"It is queer," Gene agreed, turning away.

Together they went down the slope, where the mountain lilies and red-topped mint grew thick and sweet. Under the trembling leaves they passed. Below them the valley stretched to a point where the nose of an intruding ridge shut it out. Gene glanced at the girl; saw the burnt umber of her hair and the splash of freckles over her piquant nose; saw the haunting hunger about her questioning eyes, and a

great pity came to her for this neglected child of the camp, who, like a rare white flower, had come clean through the grime and the grit of it all. She wondered what her own life would have been had she come the same path. As if moved by a mental suggestion, the girl lifted her eyes:

"You was thinking of me, wasn't you?"

"Yes; how did you know?"

"Oh, I felt it. Something down in my heart made me know it. You love me, too, don't you?"

"Yes, child."

"And I love you so much."

"I am glad for that. We will be great friends, won't we?"

"Yes, for I need you awfully. You are so good and wise. Your face is like one in a book Jim gave me. You are awful pretty." She paused and scanned the features bent on hers. "Oh, I can see miles and miles into your eyes!"

"Dear child, I want to be good, and I try to be," Gene replied, confused by the frankness of her companion. "But you must look above me for a perfect pattern. I do that. And only as I try to be like God am I what I should be."

"God is love, isn't he?" The Color asked eagerly.

"Yes, and that is why I love you—that is, I

can love you better because of it. But you are a sweet girl, and worthy of affection, dear."

With the hunger of everything motherless, the girl nestled close to her companion, and kept her arms about her. Gene touched the brown face with her lips, then they went on through the shadows, past the places where the light dripped in pools, to the parting of the ways.

VI

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NIGHT

THE June days went by like tinted dreams. Gene was becoming more and more delighted with her surroundings. The charm of the hills, the rush of white waters, the thousand melodies of wood and glade, all woke within her a deathless love for the enchanted land.

She had fixed the order of her time, breaking the day into easy divisions. First, there was a two-hour stretch devoted to The Color, up in the old powder cabin. Then came an hour at the piano. With a will, the girl entered into the solving of mysteries on key and blackboard, and Gene saw with pride the keen faculties awake and shape the new things into the logic of understanding. Genders, verbs, antecedents, case, all puzzled through her jumbled wits till they reached at last their proper relations.

With Spartan resolution she stood at grips with all the signs and dark ways of music, counting the monotonous monotone of time with fingers that ached and throat the same. Some-

times she was angry at reasonless things which she tried to make her brain take at their own terms. Again she wept. But always with a determination to master her difficulties, no matter how great they seemed, which drove her on.

Music was her heaven. Once her hands began to move over the keys, her whole being seemed to undergo a change. Her eyes gloomed and her glance was like twilight. Almost without effort, she floated along the vistas of harmony where the soul is the teacher. This was the order for three days in the week. Then came tramps over the ridges and through the scented glades, where the mint grew thick and the tracks of deer were to be seen.

On the Sabbath the two girls sat together in church, near the window, through which they could see the peaks, with their clinging patches of snow. All the missionary's labored expounding they missed by departing on swift thought and wish journeys to the folded uplands.

Fresh strikes in the hills surrounding the camp had brought in a flood of feverish gold-hunters, who sat well in at the game of chance. The dance-halls seethed with a sin-seared throng, and the bars crashed with glasses. "Whisky straight" went down the line of

booted bacchanals. Here and there groups discussed the latest strike, or—killing. The Bald Eagle eddied a double portion of the drift, and the challenge of its halls was loud to hear. Games went full blast, and tables were stacked with gold dust and silver. Back and forth the streams squeezed through the narrow ways between the dance-hall and the barroom. Out of the stew came the whine of a violin and the nasalings of ballet girls, deep in rouge. Some whirled in the arms of men flaming with liquor. Blasphemy filled the tobacco-blue air. At the front a dispute was fast coming to blows. Claps of thundering laughter underscored coarse jokes or comic songs. Men, deep in their cups, sought trouble, or gabbled while they gulped from slopping mugs. Others sprawled in fleshly heaps, or plunged about aimlessly, with wide spread of legs and arms.

From a small platform at one side a deep voice began to bawl:

“We’re three dashing rovers
From bonnie Scotland—”

And then:

“The hope of your love,
Sweet Annie Bardeen,
Is a thing that never can be.”

The song closed with a spasm of applause from a congested rim about the singer. Some

one hustled the would-be charmer off to take a drink. Already overindulged, the singer returned to his perch, and launched confidently into his favorite doggerel:

“Landlord, fill the flowing bowl,
Fill it flowing over;
For to-day we'll get staving drunk,
And to-morrow we'll get sober.”

With the closing measures the circle stampeded. A quarrel, just budding into drunken bloodshed, was stopped by lookers-on. All wished to learn the cause of the trouble and have a look at the angry men. And through it all moved women jesting, laughing—without mirth—soliciting drinks, or partners for the dance-hall; and trailing at their bells the dangling souls of men, drawn on by a smirched, though fatal, beauty. Queens of abandon were they; daughters of Jezebel and sin; sirens of forbidden isles; eaters of prohibited fruit; wild charmers to those without masts to which they might be lashed.

With a crash the swinging shutters at the front were thrown wide, and two men entered. Instantly the fact communicated itself to all in the saloon, and men turned to yield homage to the first to enter. Ten voices chimed at once: “Hello, Borden!” and, “Where you been?”

“Minding my business as a gentleman

should," Borden replied, slapping a questioner good-naturedly on the shoulder. "What's going on? Any excitement?"

"Nothing has come to a head. Boys have stopped two that promised well enough. One was on the way to guns as a side order. Hello, Jim! Bill MacKay's got the platform, but he's almost too drunk to sing, and you must get in."

Another voice, cornerless from indulgence: "Hurrah for Zhim Ke-lly! He's the best singer in camp. Why don't you all say hurrah? Get down from there, Bill, you murderer of music, and let a white man have your job. Hurrah!" A large miner, clad in blue flannel, and girt at the hips with a leather belt, toppled the drooping Bill from his seat unceremoniously.

"Ireland forever!" went up as Kelly took the platform. At the bar a wilted shape sobbed over old memories of lost things. To-morrow that wilted length would be stiff with pain and hate. A manner of good-natured abandon made Kelly a favorite. The crowd surged that way. From the tables came the thud of excited hands depositing cards high enough to risk a venture on. Under these came the flutter of roulette balls and the click of chips. Money needed in far-away homes was in the heaps; money that cost long hours of painful drudgery in the cut and the drift. To-morrow the haggard fool

would curse himself and mouth the old vow. Clean-shaven men, white of face and dark of eye, sat unmoved through the strain. They were knights of the green cloth, and these their prey.

"Hold on there! Drinks for everybody!" thundered Borden, surging to the bar. There was a general rush in that direction. Bar-flies shambled from deep chairs and corners and became sociable. A young woman mounted the foot-rail and proposed a toast, her glass high.

"Here's to courage, honesty and—and—a clean man—Borden!"

"Borden, Borden it is!" thundered the gulping line. Up and down went the flashing glasses, with a linger-crash on the bar.

A dark-faced man sneered and turned away; cursed softly and returned.

"Here's to the fairest face and the warmest heart in the hills—Minnie Moore!"

"Hurrah for Minnie Moore!" thundered the voices.

The man who proposed the toast looked keenly at Borden, and the glance was not good. Borden saw it, and connoted accordingly. To both, the glances were a challenge. The girl grew radiant, and her eyes flashed blackly bright. Those near Borden saw that he toasted the Luck Queen in water only.

"Do you mean that as a suggestion of reform?" she questioned, leaning down and speaking in an undertone, so none but Borden could hear the words.

"It wouldn't hurt you to change, girl," he replied carelessly. "Anyway, I've never made you worse."

Some mirthless laughter greeted this—then curiously:

"I've never understood you, Borden."

"I'm no saint, understand. But one has to draw the line somewhere. I make up for it in red-hell and scarlet meanness on other lines, all right."

The girl searched his face with a wistful look, but did not reply.

"By the way, who is the savage who refused to drink to me, and proposed your toast? He has been glaring at me for five minutes now."

"Oh, that's Pierre, the Frenchman. I met him in the camps to the south. I hate him! He followed me here. I thought I had given him the slip, but he came into camp a few nights ago. He proposed that we go somewhere and start a big dance-hall—to marry him—to live just for him. He's a trouble-maker, and has the blood of a dozen men on his hands. Watch him, Borden, that's all."

"I'll do that, girl. Meantime, let's hear the music."

The two drifted from the bar to where Jim was tuning his banjo. At last to his notion, his rich Irish voice rolled away on:

"I'm thinking of Erin to-night,
Of a little white cot by the sea,
Where Jennie my darling, my own,
Is watching and waiting for me."

A cloud of shovel-hardened hands clapped applause when the song was done.

"Give us the other one and we'll help ye, boy," requested an old prospector. "Allus did like that one myself. Now, that's it—away we go!"

"And they say they are looking
For the lost Charley Ross.
He's gone! He's gone!
There's nobody knows where."

A hundred voices, chesty and full, swelled the tune like a flood in a canyon, falling in whenever the singer reached the chorus:

"And they say they are looking
For the lost Charley Ross—"

"Ask him to sing the one about the picture," Minnie whispered to Borden.

He stooped to get her words, and found the eyes of the Frenchman fastened upon him when he straightened up. Borden laughed a challenge, and turned to Jim:

"Minnie wants the picture song, Jim, so dig into it about right."

With a nod to the girl and a push which located his hat still farther at the back of his head, Jim took up the words:

"In life's rugged gallery of pictures
Hang the scenes that are painted from life.
All hang on the wall,
But the saddest of all
Are the pictures from life's other side."

Borden felt the girl tremble. He glanced her and saw that her eyes were bright with tears. A feeling of pity stirred him, and his fingers closed over the hand of the Queen. He felt she needed help just then, and the assurance of sympathy.

"Come on," she said abruptly. "I don't think I want to hear the rest of that song." She led him to a small room opening on the games and the bar at the front. "We can talk here, Borden. Somehow I feel nervous to-night—upset." She sank wearily into a chair. Borden drew another to the table. The Queen dropped her chin in her hands, and looked vacantly out on the surging mass in the bar-room.

"I feel queer for some reason," she began, almost to herself. "I can't get into the stew to-night, and I want the bunch to let me alone."

I want Pierre to let me alone. I wish he had not come. He urges his love on me. Bah! As if such a brute knew the meaning of the word!"

"Where did you first meet this man?"

"It was down in Sonora, under the Sierras. I grew afraid of him and came north, but you see he has followed me."

"Did he ever mistreat you?"

The eyes of the Queen flashed.

"He tried that, but I stopped it quick! Then he threatened my life. Oh, well, what of it? I'm sick of life. It's all a gamble anyway." She turned to Borden with a hollow laugh. "It's all just a matter of luck," she went on wearily. "That's the way it seems to me. I'm Queen of the Luck, you know. I've had gamblers dance with me before going into a big game; I've had them touch me with their money, believing it would bring them success. Then I've had them shoot each other over me, afterwards."

"Can't say I take much stock in that, Minnie." Borden shook his head. "It's unreasonable. My luck's at my belt or piled on my shoulders. Yes, I can shoot if I have to. These fellows don't know that; Pierre don't know it." The reference to the Frenchman was prompted by a glimpse of the villain's face peering in at the door as he passed.

"That's bad business. Don't do it, Borden, unless you have to—unless he makes you. He's a sure one with pistols."

"Do you think he will force trouble on me?"

"He may; he has that name. Usually he has a gang backing him. That's his game. Starts a row, and during the fight does his work and no one can prove it on him."

"I'll see him, don't forget that," Borden replied, his words clear as smitten steel.

"It's serious business; it's all serious and bad." She spoke reminiscently, and a look almost of childish innocence came to her face.

"Why don't you get out? Somehow, it always did seem queer to me that right here where men wallow and fight you can find women, mixing and taking part in it all."

"Not much of a get-on-a-table-from-a-mouse about it, is there?"

"No; but answer my question: Why don't you leave?"

"You surprise me, Borden. That's easy to ask, but not so easy to answer. It's like falling into a shaft—impossible, almost, to come back. Do you see?"

"No. I hold that there is no reason for staying here. Get into an old cabin, a tent, anything but this."

"And live a hermit, spurned and despised

by all! Here the boys do say little kind things when they drink to me. Even what Pierre said sounded good. But out in the world—the prim old, decent world—it's ice and boycott. Every glance is a dagger-thrust, and every word is a pistol-shot. This is about the only place for me."

"You may have it sized up wrong, Minnie. Anyway, it's worth something to be clean."

The words struck her like hail in the face. This man whom she admired for his courage and kindness of heart looked upon her as unclean. Never before did her life seem so black to her. A half-anger burned in her as she replied:

"Clean! I was clean long after they said I was not." The girl's eyes flashed.

"Tell me about it, Minnie. I'm in the mood to-night. Let's talk it out."

The girl remained silent for some time.

"There's not much to tell. These stories all read alike. I was young; thrust out to make my way. When flattery and the offer of money failed, they tried to frighten me by telling me that I could not get on with those who hired me; that I was running contrary to custom, and things like that. Then came one I thought noble and good. Bah! He was the chief devil of them all. Words of love, a glass of some-

thing to drink, followed by darkness and ruin. It was drugged. In this way he smirched the snow of my young soul. Over the crystals of my virtue he sprinkled my own moral blood in hellish baptism. Look at me now! I am something flung from the rock. I drift with the currents of the Seven Seas. For months I followed him, a terrible something eating in my heart—followed him till I knew he was dead and it was no use. I would have killed him with my own hand.”

He looked at her keenly.

“It was an accident—a cave-in—I am glad now, for I feel differently.”

“Jim is always talking about good raising, and he thinks he has had considerable of it. He would say that you had been well brought up, and you would be pretty, Minnie, if the light was behind your face.”

The girl brightened. “My mother was an angel! Sometimes her voice comes to me, and I hear her speaking in the old, loving way. Last night I dreamed of putting my head in her lap, and that she ran her hands softly over my face and stroked my hair. Oh! what she said was sweet—sweet as the wind in the aspens. But they don’t know that, those prim folks in the big, iron-hearted world.”

“I think there may be exceptions,” Borden

replied. He was thinking of Gene Truxton.

"I don't. I sat under a pine near the way by which they left church last Sunday and watched the fine feathers go by. Only one spoke to me—she looked like an angel—the rest stared and passed on. If I lay dying here in this place, not one of them would come to me."

"What did she say to you?"

"The one who spoke to me?"

"Yes."

"I lost the words thinking of the sweetness of her voice and looking at her. Her face made me think of—God. I saw in her what I was once, or could have been."

"And could be again, Minnie—hear me?"

The girl's head sank wearily on her folded arms. Borden leaned forward and gazed vacantly out on the surging mass of drink-inflamed men in the barroom. Jim's voice came to him, rollicking over a pleasing measure:

"My hands are horny, hard and black,
From working in the vein,
And, like the clothes upon my back,
My speech is rough and plain."

At every recurrence of the chorus a storm of male voices crashed in:

"Down in the gold mine, underneath the ground."

For some time Borden sat watching the

movements outside. Somehow, it all seemed different to him to-night. The curtain was up at last, a little way. For the first time in all his free young life he felt something of disgust for what he saw. Till now it had been an avenue for excitement, but in a moment it had taken to it moral quality, and he was looking at it through eyes not all blind.

From it he turned to the bowed girl. He saw that her brown hair fell in pleasing abandon about her temples and neck. He looked at her hands. How pathetic they seemed in their white emptiness. Suddenly he was conscious of anger. If only he could have before him those who had wronged her, he would crush them one by one. Unconsciously his hands clenched, and he breathed fast. Some one passed the door. Borden looked up and almost rose to his feet: the glittering eyes of the Frenchman were fastened upon him. Here was one of her tormentors within reach. He would do for him now. The Frenchman caught the movement and went out swiftly.

From the dance-hall came the scraping of a violin and the crash of a piano, accentuating the swish of feet. The mood passed, and something else in the nature of Borden stirred. He stretched his arms with a short laugh. Inwardly he thought: "This won't do. It's chesty men

for me, the song and the fight. These are elemental—good.”

The girl raised her head with a little sigh.

“I’m blue to-night, Borden—forget it. You must pay no attention to me. Women are all silly, you know, at times. It’s too late now to be thinking of what might have been. Once down, you can’t get up, so it’s just stay here for me. But I do get tired of it all. I long to be like the white waters; but there is no use. I have too many scars on my soul. You don’t understand me, Borden, do you? Look! It’s always that—crashing glasses, cursing and swinish drunkenness, with the beastly after-fruits. It’s a chain, link in link. I know the stages. First, it’s the jolly line-up and the first drinks of the night. Then comes the song period. After that the fighting moods, and then— Ah, Borden, do you get me? I’m tired. I’ve seen drunken men till I can’t think of them separate from the slop of barrooms.” The girl yawned languidly.

“Judging from what is going on out there, they have about reached the fighting period,” Borden commented, nodding toward the door. The girl followed his glance.

High words and the sound of blows came to them. The tinkle of the banjo ceased, and the crowd surged about the combatants, the

friends of the fighters taking sides according to their whims.

"Guess I'll have to see that," said Borden, rising.

Together they crossed the room toward the front, jostling their way through the excited crowd. Borden saw the Frenchman watching them as they passed. Half-way to the bar they were prevented from going farther by the jam. From where he stood, Borden watched the fray, and was not long in detecting design in the affair. A ruffian pressed in close and spoke foully to the Queen. The next instant he was lying wilted and bewildered on the floor. Borden stood over the fallen insulter, his eyes full of battle-light, his lips drawn in the old dangerous smile.

Swift and catlike, Pierre slipped through the crowd, his hand at his hip.

"Sacre! The boy strikes a hard blow. Can he represent himself as well in the way of gentlemen?"

"Don't use that word, you snake!" said Borden, facing the Frenchman.

The fight was over, and the crowd surged to where Borden and Pierre stood facing each other. A dozen roughs ranged themselves close to their chief, sullen and ready.

"Take that back—one minute you have."

"Oh, I guess not, Frenchie, not to-night."

The quick jerk of the Frenchman's arm, which lifted a revolver from its holster, was not so quick as the blow which dropped him headlong. At the same instant several men surged toward him, and Borden sensed the yielding flesh under his blows. The factions clashed on the instant, and struggling pairs doubled about the room. A blow at the side of the head staggered Borden, but in three heart-beats he was back at perfect poise. In and out of the milling pairs the crowd heaved and breasted, shouting directions, and interfering when some overmatched belligerent went down.

In the midst of his henchmen Pierre crouched. Borden had a dim recollection of the bartender lunging among them, calling for order. A volley of drunken curses greeted him, and several men drew deadly weapons. Then came the crash of a pistol-shot, followed by others, and Borden felt a singe of hot air at his cheek—"a close call," thought he. Suddenly the lights went out, and from the darkness came a low moan of pain. Gradually the din died away. He turned where the Queen had been, but she was gone.

"Stand back there!" he shouted. "Somebody's hurt. Bring a light." The crowd fell

into a circle around the voice. The next instant the lights came on.

"Minnie Moore's hurt—done for!" went through the crowd.

Borden dropped on his knees beside the gasping girl. She lay pale and still, her eyes full of a strange wonder. She looked up and smiled faintly as Borden bent over her.

"The luck has failed," she whispered with a sigh, pressing her hand to her side, where a dark spot showed ominously.

Borden lifted her in his arms and carried her into the little room where they had talked, and placed her on the table. Folding his coat, he put it under his head. In a few moments the crowd filtered back to the dance-hall and the barroom, leaving Borden and a few others to care for the wounded girl.

"Oh, I don't want to die here!" she moaned. "It was bad enough to live in such a place. I want to die in a clean place! But who would take the Luck Queen in? Who would give her even a place to die?"

Borden dispatched a messenger for the only doctor in the camp. In ten minutes he returned with the information that the physician was helplessly drowned in his cups. Meantime, he sought to cheer the pleading girl.

"It's all right, Minnie. You are not seri-

ously hurt, and you will be well in a little time. I'll find a clean place—leave that to me."

Inwardly Borden was thinking:

"Would she do it? She believes in religion—would she do it?" Then through shut teeth: "I'll put her to the test and see!"

Turning to Jim, Borden instructed him to keep the Queen supplied with water, and that no one was to bother her in any way.

"If that Frenchman shows up, square accounts with him in a hurry," he threw over his shoulder as he strode out of the saloon.

"I'll do it, pard," said Kelly, with a good-natured smile, at the same time drawing his holster from the hip to the front.

As Borden passed through the barroom, he saw that Pierre and his followers were gone. Without answering the many questions sent after him, he swung into the street and turned toward the cabin of Superintendent Truxton. Men, restless as mountain streams, surged along the clattering sidewalks, their chesty voices echoing up the sides of the canyon. The wailing of violins seeped through the swinging shutters of the saloons, and stole like vagrant perfume along the town. In and out the feverish mill swirled. Groups stood in the spots lighted by inside lamps and discussed the things which interest a man of fortune. Somewhere a

woman's voice rose shrill on the last notes of a song. As it died away among the pines there was the usual crash of hard palms in brief applause.

"Poor fool!" thought Borden. "This is no place for a woman. Whatever brought these girls into this stew? God! it's sure not what it might be."

At the end of the rambling sidewalk a small stream rushed under a bridge, in haste to be united in crystal marriage with the larger one which splashed among its white boulders behind the houses. Beyond the bridge the cabins were more scattering, and the pines came down to the street. Out of the life-filled dusk came the smell of laurel and cedar. The tall hemlocks stood thick enough over the skirting slopes to keep the air full of murmurs. The sound in their tops was strangely weird to Borden, as he passed along.

At a turn in the trail he glimpsed the light in the Truxton cabin, and a moment later he was before the door. A step caused him to turn, and Gene stood before him. She had been walking under the trees, and was just returning as Borden came up.

"I was looking for you," he began abruptly. "There's a girl bad hurt down in one of the saloons, and she don't want to die there—

though she may. I think there's a good chance for it to be fatal—the shot—she's wounded. Anyway, she's down there on a gambling-table, pleading to be taken to a clean place where she may die."

Even under the dim light of the stars he saw her turn pale as she comprehended his words.

"You understand what I mean?"

"I understand!"

"Well, how is it?"

"It would be awful for her to die in such a place as that," Gene evaded, trying to collect her wits.

"Well—!"

For a moment she looked at him, her eyes wide with fear. She was resolving on something he did not understand, and very naturally misunderstood her hesitation.

"Remember, everybody else feels about as you do. I would take her to my cabin and care for her, but I suppose that would not be just the thing, exactly."

"No, no, she can't go there. But suppose she should die among those awful men! She may be dying now; think of it!"

"There's danger of it," he added quickly, his voice betraying a trace of impatience.

For a moment Gene looked at him in silence.

He saw that she was resolving something, and did not break in.

"She shall come here with me. I will go to her now, if—if you will show me where she is."

Before he could reply, Gene entered the cabin, and in a few words explained to Aunt Ruth that she was needed at the side of a young woman who was probably dying. That mild matron eased herself of the ordinary cautions as to taking cold and being careful.

Gene lost no time. Casting something filmy over her head and slipping something that glittered into her bosom, she stepped out under the stars where Borden stood waiting for her. He had not dreamed of her offering to go to the saloon. In fact, he was doubtful whether she would give the Luck Queen a place to die. Now he saw his mistake. At first he had looked at her as a mere woman, like all her kind, as he knew them. As to her religion, it was an outgrowth of her nature and her teaching. Men were not creatures of sentiment—or they should not be—therefore these things belonged to women. Women were made to be petted, teased, patronized, on occasion. But in a moment his well-poised theory dissolved like mist. He looked at the patrician girl beside him and saw that she was filled with a great strength. All fear had gone from her face, and she stood

calm and ready. In that instant he understood how martyrs met the flames with songs or prayer. Gene Truxton was not like other women! From seeing her as a modest flower, made to be sheltered and cared for, she had suddenly become a star. In his eyes she was some astral being, brave and beautiful. Something soft and odorous as altar incense smote his nostrils. It was as the swinging of censers. Borden was dimly aware that that which touched him was a soul emanation, an expression of spirit glow reaching to his own inner life. High in the heaven of his conceptions he hung this chaste orb. He saw her transcendently above him. She did not belong to his class, yet she moved beside him as though a creature of his own sphere. A feeling half anger, half wonder possessed him. Some men are echoes; some are original, elemental. Borden was the last two. Something prompted him to surrender himself to something else. Instantly he was in rebellion. He was himself and great in his parts. It was in him to make a great sacrifice, or give himself in magnificent abnegations. With this was a capacity for wild revolt.

With the chaos of his conclusions regarding women in the dust, there came an almost undefined wish, not so much to be like the girl beside

him, as to remove that which separated them. Such were the thoughts which whirled through his mind as they glided down the path through the aspens and the bunch grass filled with the zirr of insects.

"Are you afraid?" he questioned as they reached the street.

"Yes, I—I—think I am. It's all new to me, and it's—awful!"

"I guess that's about the facts," he agreed. "But remember you are with me, and men know what that means in Deadman." He looked at her pure face and the starlight on her hair, and was proud of her. Strength he loved, courage he worshiped. And she had that, thank Heaven! if she was a woman. The glorious power to suffer and be still was hers. The quality that would send her to the deepest depths to save the object of her love; the steadfast resolution to brave any opposition to be right, crowned her like a divine halo.

"You need not fear, Miss Truxton; I'll protect you if it should be necessary." Borden strode on in silence, his thoughts a tangle which he could not bring into order till he heard the piping voice of a young miner hailing him from the streetside:

"I say, Borden. Where did you catch that?"

The next instant the youth, too much in his

grog for his better sense, stood up stiff and staring before the blazing eyes of Borden, who hissed a few thin words between his tight-shut teeth.

"Don't make that mistake again, Charlie—get me?"

"I see, Bord, I see. Yes, yes, I understand. No harm meant. Just a mistake, you understand, just a mistake. So long, pard, so long." The sobered young fellow thought it the better part of valor to get into new territory, and decamped.

Instinctively Gene drew closer to Borden as they entered the Bald Eagle. He looked down at her and smiled assurance. She was very pale, but unshaken. A throng of milling men swirled right and left to let them pass. For a moment Gene paused at the door, a wild fear thrilling to her heart. The scene which met her gaze was fearsome, bewildering. She was in the midst of desperate wickedness; it pulsed in the air, and clutched her like a madness. Till now, she had known of this side of life only from chance statements and surmises. Now her own feet stood in the center of the Black Way. She was looking upon sin in all its scarlet. Into her ears ribaldry and ingenious devilment were hurling their throaty challenge. The stench in the air smothered her. Cosmic flesh was voic-

ing its ancient hell-cry. For an instant she hesitated and drew back. Then she set her glance ahead and went on.

"Don't back out now. I'm here to see that you are treated all right, remember."

She glanced at him and saw that she could trust him.

"Go on," she commanded, and the next moment they were in the midst of the boiling crowd, which closed around them like a wave.

The sight which greeted Gene was gruesome, dragonish. Men in all stages of intoxication reeled about, babbling and silly. Others were there for different reasons. These stood or moved about, clear-eyed and silent. Some slopped at the bar; others lay in beastly sleep in corners. There was an endless crash of glasses and the constant clatter of roulette balls. The fetid atmosphere of the place was stitched with the lost wanderings of a distant violin. Somewhere a woman was singing in a shrill, soulless voice.

Gene was bewildered with fear and the newness of it all. The blasphemy horrified her; and the drunkenness was unbearable. She felt that she was not only near to the gates of sin, but that she had entered in and was being thronged with the denizens of darkness.

For a moment she regretted coming. Then

she recalled the fact that other women were there. But what of this? Their presence would only take from her that natural protection which she might claim even from a savage. These were the pawns of passion, the playthings of brutish men. These bearded savages would not see that she was not one of them, and what might the mistake cost her?

A giant in a flowing black beard surged through the crowd, and stormily invited Borden to drink with him. Gene looked in fear on the stack of drink-seething muscle and flesh, just now furnace-hot with the deviltry of drink. His blue flannel shirt gaped wide at the neck, revealing a chest hairy as a gorilla's. He was a wolfish man, and the spirit of the neck was in him. He grasped Borden with a large, dirty hand, and would have dragged him to the bar.

"Can't do it, Burke, this time. Got another lead," said Borden, in a conciliatory manner.

"Oh, that don't go with me, Bord. No man refuses to drink with Burke to-night without fighting for it, so come along."

"Can't do it, Burke. Get some one else to drink with you this time. I'm all right busy." Borden shook the man off and shouldered into the pack.

This the man interpreted with his fuddled wits as an insult which could not be tolerated.

"I say you'll drink with me—get it? You're the first man who has had the nerve to refuse, and I'll make you—come on."

"You know me, Burke, and I say I won't." Borden's words broke like glass.

"See here, young fellar, you've got a pretty nifty rep around this here camp for muscle. But you've never had tightnens with old Burke yet, and I reckon this is about as good a time as any for us to settle it. Shy your linen, sonny, and toe the mark."

As he spoke, the giant rolled up his sleeves, revealing layers of coarse, animal-like muscles. Gene looked from the gorilla to Borden, and was surprised to find that the fear which affected her was not felt by him. He stood looking the giant over with a glance level as the rays of the sun, a half-smile on his clean-shaven mouth. Gene was surprised at herself for making this comparison at such a time. She was becoming interested in the issue of this contest. There had come to her revelations which interested—fascinated her. Men, as she had known them, had been mild enough. Certainly, they had laughed in a chesty way, and sometimes talked with much lung. But never till now had she seen the primordial instincts of the male nature turned loose. The elemental was shaking itself from the slumber of ages.

Such things as she was looking upon had happened over heaps of raw meat at the cave's mouth; it had been the order of things in the primordial forest, when fang met fang and claw met claw.

The gorilla called for a drink, and, while he waited, Borden tried to get away.

"Can't sneak off like that, youngster; oh, no," said Burke, planting himself before Borden.

"Once more I tell you that I don't want trouble with you, Burke, and that I have urgent business. You are mean to-night from too much bar business. Get out of my way. I have this young woman with me; she is under my protection, and miners respect the right sort of women."

"Better get out of the way, Burke; Borden is grinning in that way of his, and you know what that means," said Jack Harrington, coming from the room where the Queen lay.

"Where'd you find her, Bord? I say, she's a beaut, a regular nugget, and well washed," said a miner, placing his hand on Gene's shoulder.

Before Gene could draw back, or utter the cry which rose to her lips, Borden took a quick step, and struck the offender with open hand on the mouth, sending him backward in a long fall to the floor.

"That looks like you'd fight for the gal," said Burke, edging toward Gene, who drew back from him in terror.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of old Burke, gal. I ain't going to hurt you. I jest want to try it out with this chap, Borden. He's some man, you understand, but so am I, and I feel jest like knowing which is the best one."

"None of that, Burke! Don't undertake to put your dirty fingers on her—get me?"

"Oho! That works. Well, you'll have to keep them off, then." Burke pushed in close. Gene recoiled from him as from a maned lion.

"I guess I'll have to fight him; there don't seem to be any way out of it," Borden whispered to Gene.

She did not reply, but her glance flashed him courage. She marveled at the hardihood of any one who could face such a man. Frightened as she was, Gene was vaguely conscious of a feeling of admiration for her companion, though she feared for him in the contest. There must have been something of this in her eyes, for he smiled and assured her that he had whipped worse men. Big as the giant was, he would teach him a lesson.

"He's strong as a horse, but that is not all of it. Wish I could get out of it, though."

"Got to do it, sonny. I've had this on the

book for some time, and I never felt more hefty than right now. Whoop-a-ree! Clear the track, boys, the fun's on."

Instantly the crowd formed a circle around the two men. There was to be lively work, and they welcomed it with cosmic relish. Harrington crossed and stood with folded arms close to Gene. She was instantly enlisted on Borden's side of the fray. The gorilla had forced the trouble, and he should not win in the coming battle. She hoped that he would receive the lesson he needed. Her eyes swept the two men; one ox-like in his massive strength, the other wire-woven in every fiber and gloriously fit. Above the brushy beard of the giant his cheeks showed red as an inflammation. From under bushy brows peered small, beady eyes, not bad in their natural expression, but banked with brute fires just then.

With some caution he tightened the rolls of his shirt-sleeves, spat into the palms of his hands, struck his ponderous chest right and left, and came thundering to the fight.

It was all over in a minute. Gene never could recall clearly the process of that brief test of thews. She was far clearer in the sense of admiration with which she looked upon her companion. Till that moment she had thought of him as a very virile, strong man, given to

revelry and sin. But out of this struggle shone something of moral quality; something that made him well-favored in her eyes. There were two things quite clear afterwards: Borden's face, with its clear, hard smile, and the sound of a blow, full of destruction, followed by the collapsing bulk of the gorilla. She remembered that Borden helped the bewildered giant to his feet, when he came to himself, and that the saloon rocked to the yells of the miners. The next she remembered was being led out of the press by Borden, and that the violin had ceased its whine.

"Mighty sorry I had to get into that," he apologized. "Burke's a good fellow when he's himself. But he's been going high to-night, and he wanted a mix with me."

"I don't blame you; it served him just right. He'll behave next time," she replied.

He looked at her quickly. In that instant something had cleared in his soul. The veil between the natural and the spiritual was rent in a measure, and something infinitely tender and soft of tread came in the holy place of his being. It was the moment of revelation, of clear, sweet truth, and it bathed him in a delicious sunshine. His blood went pounding through him, and something blew upon his mind like the spell of a seer. Truth-tellers entered

into him and began to make record, and he knew without effort at classification or reasoning that, from this time on, life to him never could be reckoned apart from this woman. He was conscious now that he never had been complete; that there was a complement of his being set somewhere in the vast universe, and he had found it. It was yet as the mist of the moon to Borden, but he knew, as wild things know direction, that she was—destiny.

All this appealed to another element in his nature—in all natures of worthy parts—a willingness to sacrifice, to yield to self-surrender; the laying upon the altar of love all that loves. This demand, subtle and dominant, challenged his love of liberty, for it premonitated captivity. Swift on the track of the pleasing discovery came a rebellious mood, and he rose against the intruding element.

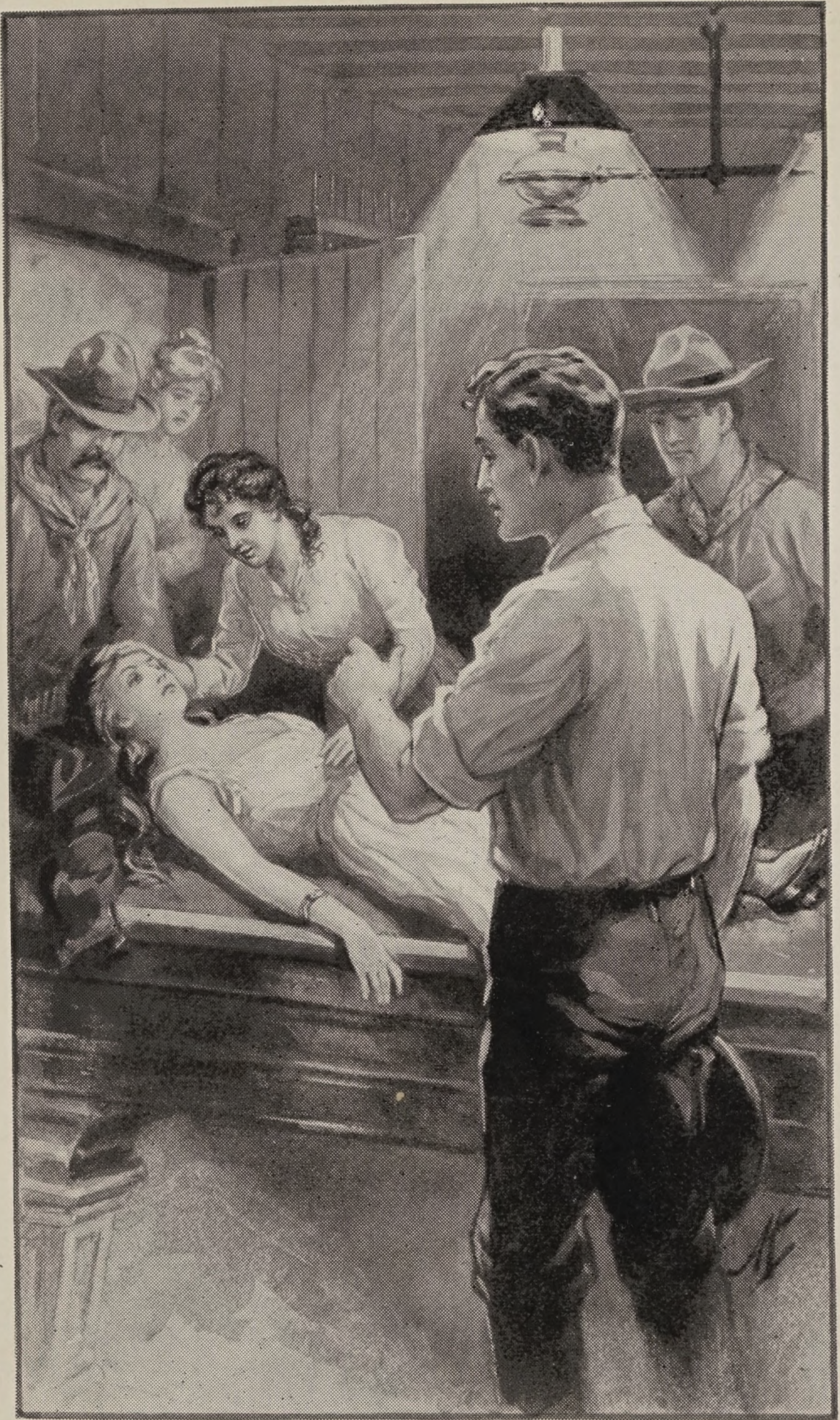
At the door of the little room stood Jim, his eyes full of surprise, and his hand resting easily on the slouching holster at his side.

“So that’s where you went, is it? I’d ’a’ gambled you’d come back alone.”

“How’s the Queen?” Borden interrupted.

“Still alive, and asking for a clean place to die—or get well in. She’ll be mighty glad to see you, Miss Truxton.”

Gene entered the room without answering,



"Gene passed her hand gently over the girl's face"

and went directly to where the girl lay, her head propped with Borden's coat. As Gene bent over her, the feverish eyes of the Queen searched her face wonderingly, and a cry of surprise burst from her lips.

"You here? Why did you come? How did you know? I remember you—the pure one. I hated you that day you came from church, but not like the rest, for you spoke to me, and you looked like an angel. Oh, I'm so glad you came!"

Gene passed her hand gently over the girl's forehead with a caressing touch.

"I came because I wanted to help you, and take you home with me. Mr. Borden told me that you were hurt, and that you did not want to die here. I am sure it would be worse to live here."

The Queen's eyes sought Borden's face. "I might have known—he has always been good to me. If all men were like him—" The words trailed out in a moan.

Gene looked into the hot eyes of the girl and pitied her.

"Will you go with me?" she asked. "I can take good care of you, and I am quite sure you will get well."

"Oh, do! Take me away—take me somewhere. I don't want to stay here."

Spent with pain and loss of blood, the Queen

became unconscious. In her delirium she babbled of those she had known in childhood. Often in the incoherent flow the name of her mother appeared. Now she was back with her playmates and school-fellows. Later she was giving her promise to some one. After this came cursing and pleadings.

Gene's eyes were full of tears as she gave orders to have the girl taken to her house. Refusing the aid which Jack Harrington urged upon him, Borden lifted the girl in his arms and carried her into the street, the other at his side. As he passed through the barroom, the gorilla stepped out close to him:

"I say, sonny, you're all right. Did it on the dead square, and gave me about what was coming to me. From this on, Burke's your friend, remember that. If you ever need me in any way, you know where to find me."

"We'll call it square, old man," Borden answered pleasantly, and passed out.

The crowds of the street parted to let the four pass, staring hard after them till the mist of the night swallowed them up. With a feeling of infinite relief, Gene crossed the little bridge which separated the dense part of the camp from the scattered cabins among the pines. Jim and Harrington pushed ahead to show the trail, and Borden dropped back with Gene.

"You've given me something of a different view of things to-night, Miss Truxton. I admire your courage. I never dreamed of you offering to go down to that place. I know it seemed like the regions of inferno to you. There are not many would have risked it."

"It is awful!" she replied. "I felt like one surrounded by lost spirits—and I think I was. I am surprised at myself for going. But she might have died there in that horrible place, with no one to say a word to her." Gene shuddered.

"I've seen the day I would argue that with you. But, somehow, it looks different to me to-night."

"I hardly see how you could do that," she replied conclusively.

"You must not get too bad an opinion of those fellows; they are not as bad as they appear. When they get too much whisky they are given to noise and fighting, but, sober and away, they are an honest, rugged set; ready to go to death for you, or divide the last blanket or crust."

"I feel sorry for this poor girl," Gene went on, turning from the drift of conversation.

"Yes, so do I," he agreed with spirit. "She's not all bad, either. One might think so, but she's not. She'd give her last dollar to any

one in trouble, and she has done it many a time. All she needs is to get the old light back to her eyes and she'd be as pretty as a picture. There's a chance for that girl to be worthy of any man or woman's regard."

"Who is the man ahead?" she asked casually.

"Oh, that's Jack Harrington. He's one of the spenders of the camp. Has plenty of money, too, and always stood by the Queen. He's a handsome dog, and full of meanness; though, like the rest, he has his good points. I never liked his pace, though—too swift for me, and a little too far from clean work. I don't mind it if a chap throws off the conventional, but I want him to carry a pay-streak of real manhood."

She glanced at him with an amused light in her eyes.

He laughed. "I understand. You think that means that Harrington is some bad one. Well, both of us might make improvement."

They had reached the bend of the trail from which the light of the Truxton cabin could be seen. In a few minutes they were at the door, and Aunt Ruth was expressing her surprise in a series of exclamations and questions which she did not expect answered.

Borden placed the unconscious girl on the

bed, and then stepped back to give Superintendent Truxton a chance to examine the wound. The old man had picked up a crude knowledge of surgery in the camps of the frontier, and it came in good just now.

"Used to know something about this sort of thing myself," he began, bustling about getting water and linen. "Many's the chap I've pulled through because I understood how to get a pistol ball out of a wound." Making a hasty examination, he pronounced the Queen well within the zone of hope.

"Not fatal, but bad enough. It don't need to kill her, though. Get me towels and a stimulant, Gene. I'll have her fixed up in a jig's time."

While her father dressed the wound, Gene prepared a comfortable cot near her own bed in the rear room. Harrington stood for some minutes looking down at the troubled features of the unconscious girl, a strange expression on his face.

"I'll pay all the expense that may attach to this case," he said, turning to Gene. "We must save her if possible—poor Minnie!" He stood for some time gazing at the wan face, now almost childish in its drawn beauty. "Poor Minnie," he repeated, "her feet have been fearfully torn. We'll keep track of how she fares, and if there's anything we can do, let us know."

When all had been done that could be, Borden went down the trail with his companion, through the claspings night.

"I tell you, Borden, this thing's hell, red hell! It's got on my nerves. When I saw that girl shot half to death, I felt like putting giant under that whole side of the street and blowing it, barkeep, booze, drunks, fiddles, and all, out of the canyon."

Borden laughed. "You're nervous, Jack. You'll feel differently to-morrow. I know you. It's an impulse that's got you to-night. Within three days you'll be flying high, and you won't care whether the Queen lives or dies."

"Sorry you have such an opinion of me, Borden. But you're wrong this time. It's bad—all bad, and always that. I'm no angel, and I've had my fling, but there's a strange feeling got me. I can appreciate what is best. Wish I was tied to a clean woman! God! I'd love her and worship her eternally."

Borden stiffened: "A good woman for you, Harrington! Forget it. Why should you expect a good woman? You've wallowed in the stews and baited the butterflies; you've fed your soul on the red lotus when you should have given it the white narcissus. Now, you cry out for a clean woman, and ten to one you'll win out on that point; but you should not."

Harrington looked at his companion without replying. Busy thought was weaving its web, and starting seeds in his better nature were daring to stir under the warmth of the mood which possessed him.

"So you think I'll forget it, do you? Well, that's my nature, and I may. But, whether I do or not, facts are facts, and what I say is true; this thing is scarlet, purple-dyed in its meanness. Whether I quit or not—and I don't think I'll quit—I'll always know that I saw clearly to-night."

Borden watched the trim figure gliding down the trail till the night took him into its misty depths.

"A pure woman for Jack Harrington! He wants a pure woman! Well, Gene Truxton is pure. But she would not be pure long if he touched her with his debonair hands."

For some time Borden stood thinking unclassified thoughts; then he turned and went into the cabin.

VII

THE WAY OF THE CAMP

BORDEN knew that Pierre would seek a date for settlement. In his way he loved the Queen, and the fact that she had spurned him stung him to madness. He had watched Borden carry the unconscious girl away, and in his soul there was born an evil determination to let blood. Borden understood all this perfectly, and went armed.

In the fascination of the kill-lust, the lust for blood by the man who has opened the veins of big game, the Frenchman schemed to take Borden's life. Borden knew that the shot which had wounded the Queen was intended for him, and that in the serpent nature of the villain this fact would be an added inducement for the deed. He determined, therefore, not to be found sleeping.

The morning came like the passing of spirits. The hills lifted themselves from a dusk overmastering in its vastness. Here and there the upper peaks burst into yellow flame. These accentuated the muffled mass of heave and ridge

below. A thin mist hung over the canyon, tipping the aspen groves in pale streamers. Borden walked under the pines near his cabin and breathed the crisp air. There was life in it, and the taste was good.

Jim prepared breakfast and called his partner in. They ate almost in silence. At last Borden became willing to talk. In detail they went over the events of the night before. That there must be a settlement both knew, and they nerved themselves for it.

When they left the cabin the sun had flooded the mountain land, and the shadows were gone out of the canyons.

"Think I'll swing up the trail and see how the Queen's making it," said Borden, going out.

He was restless, and his ideas were a tumult. He had tried to analyze them, but gave it up. Of one thing there was no doubt; he wished to see Gene Truxton again. He rebelled at this. It had all come so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that Borden was silenced with wonder. He never had reckoned on this side of his nature. In fact, he did not know till now that he had such a side.

Gene met him at the door, smiling. Her cloud of bright hair sprayed about her face. She was dressed in cool white. For a moment he stood by the bed and spoke rambling, mean-

ingless things to the Queen. The girl lay pale and suffering, but she smiled at his confusion, for she guessed the reason of it. Languidly her glance wandered out where Gene went about the tasks of the morning. She was a glorious creature, made for the gardens of love. When Borden was gone, she turned wearily to Gene:

“He’s rough in a way, but good. I’ve known him here in the camp, and he’s not like other men. He drinks at times, just to set something going, but I never saw him under the influence of it. He swears fearfully when he gets mad, but he’s clean. He’s been like a brother to me. A little while before I was hurt, he was telling me to get out of that place, and trying to give me hope. He has education, if he cared to use it; but he loves the turmoil and excitement of the saloons where a mongrel speech is used. I’ll always remember him for a real and true friend.” The girl looked languidly out of the window, where a clump of mountain cherry banked its white glory against the wall. Some petals were caught by a breath of air and blown over her couch. She gathered them in her hands, one by one, and crushed them. Gene saw the look on her face and knew that she was seeing her own wind-swept life, from the bough of cleanness to the wallows of the street.

Jim leaned in the door and waited for Borden.

"She's getting on all right," the latter volunteered, seeing the question in the eyes of his partner. "I have to go uptown for fuse and powder—want to go along?"

Jim nodded and swung into the trail. The sight of Gene Truxton had intensified the fever in Borden's blood, and threw his wits into a more aggravating tangle. Something took life within him, dominated his soul, and stirred him with a strange hunger—a hunger for Gene Truxton which would abide with him forever.

Deadman seethed with a virile life. New strikes had brought in swarms of gold-hunters and adventurers. Streams of men came and went on the street, and pack-trains trailed down the canyons, or wound through the camp, laden with the output of the mines to which no road could be made. Ore-wagons thundered to and from the mills. The saloons emptied themselves upon the street. Here and there a barkeep, in white apron, could be seen leaning against the side of a door, while gamblers trimmed their ivory nails in cool preparation for the next victim of their black art. All were drinking the anodyne of the sun and air. Through this jam of men Pierre went and came, feline, tawny. Suddenly he grew tense, peering between the

groups like a cougar watching the browsing deer in a mountain glade—Borden was walking directly toward him.

The mind of Pierre worked fast. He had loved a girl; he, Lewis Pierre. He had followed that girl from camp to camp till he found her—found her calling for a toast for this miner. *Sacre!* It had all gone ill. His bullet was wild. Doubtless the girl was dead. No one should interfere with his aim this time.

Moving quickly to where half a dozen men lounged, the Frenchman spoke low words and passed on, but there was one who had seen the movement, and understood.

"I'll just head off this little game of Frenchie's, and I'll see that the boy has a show," mused Burke, edging up close to the group.

Presently one of the men moved away at such an angle as to intercept Borden. The others fell in behind him. It was all in harmony with that strange spirit of change which keeps crowds moving, and Borden noticed nothing unusual.

"He put me down and out in good shape, but I don't hold nothing agin him," Burke continued to himself. Borden stopped as a heavy hand gripped his shoulder, and, turning, he looked into the face of the giant.

"Hello, Burke!" he greeted, good-naturedly. "How are you?"

"Able for my bacon," laughed the gorilla.

"Glad to hear it, old fellow. Hope we won't need another try-out—eh?"

"One's enough for me, thanks!" Then lower, "The Frenchman is planning trouble; look out."

Borden nodded. "I'm wise to it, Burke, and—ready." Borden moved on, and Pierre's henchmen drew up. A gambler accosted him:

"I say, Borden, how's the girl? Not any old tunnel-badger can walk into a saloon and carry off a pretty little creature like that, bodily. Where'd you cash her, anyway?"

The purpose of this was all clear to Borden, and his reply was to send the man in a heap to the sidewalk, then, whirling about, he faced the Frenchman, who had drawn a revolver.

"I know your game, Pierre, so don't sneak. Get in the open and face the showdown." Borden stood fiercely defiant, his hand at his hip.

Pierre's henchmen began to press in.

"Stand back there, you set of thieves and bar-flies," thundered Burke, shouldering his way through the crowd. "If one of you fellows bats an eye, I'll let daylight through you—get me?" The men fell back.

"This camp is too small for both of us," hissed the Frenchman, his evil glance riveted on Borden.

"Then leave."

"Perhaps. But go with me as far as the street, will you?"

"With pleasure, Frenchie," Borden replied, pushing to the edge of the sidewalk.

"Fair play, remember! I'll settle with the man who interferes," bawled Burke.

Pierre shot him a menacing glance and stepped into the street. The crowd rolled in against the houses, leaving the two men facing each other at twenty paces. Both were cool, both were smiling, both were dangerous. Pierre stood with level weapon, Borden with folded arms. Jim edged to a place where he spoke steel-like jests to his partner, though he held a drawn revolver in his hand.

"Are you ready, men?"

Borden turned to the crowd: "This is no plan of mine; the Frenchman wants it. Last night he tried for my life and wounded the Queen. There seems to be nothing for it but a fight, for that man don't live who can push me off the sidewalk, or say where I may go. I'm ready, Frenchie; it's your shot."

A crash and cloud of blue smoke was the answer. With a catlike movement the French-

man stepped aside to get the effect of his shot, and saw Borden standing with folded arms. With an oath the Frenchman prepared to fire again, but before he could bring his weapon to range, Borden sent a ball into his shoulder, and the Frenchman's arm sagged limply.

"Are you satisfied, or shall I finish you?" Borden asked, his weapon still in position.

With fine bravado the Frenchman picked his revolver from the road with his left hand, only to receive a second disabling wound in that shoulder as well, and he sank to the ground, whimpering for his life.

"The fight's off," yelled one of the henchmen, bounding into the street, flourishing a revolver. Instantly a dozen more surrounded their chief.

Burke went through them like a loosened cliff, scattering them like leaves. He had not considered it necessary to touch his holster, but his huge fists went out right and left, leaving vacant spots where men had stood, and his deep voice rolled over them like thunder. Kelly went smiling to a point where he commanded the ranks of the henchmen. Jack Harrington edged to the sidewalk, debonair and smiling, a dangerous quantity. Borden stood eager and aroused.

"There'll be scarlet work in Deadman if one

of those fellows opens fire," said Borden, his hand at his hip.

Burke shouldered among the gamblers, his mountain battle-cry ringing a challenge. Borden joined him. He was thoroughly aroused now, and poured a stream of insult on the gang. Slowly the henchmen disappeared, howling threats.

"The devil will be to pay with that bunch yet," commented Kelly, going down the street with his partner.

"Hurrah for Borden!" rumbled the giant, and instantly a hundred voices repeated the cheer.

"That's a nest of murderers," said Borden, decisively, "and they are doing all manner of shady work. A miner found dead up one of the creeks and his dust gone. Another robbed and thrown into a shaft with his heart holding a bullet. That's the gang that's doing the work."

"Frenchie won't get into a game for awhile," laughed Kelly.

"I could have finished him, but I don't like the look of blood—for it's hard to get off the hands."

"You did the right thing, pard. But you sure can swear some. I never heard you beat it. Where did you learn it, anyway? You made my hair stand up. Really, Borden, I think the

devil could take lessons from you in that line."

Borden's face clouded. "I don't like to hear you say that, Jim," he replied, "for I had made up my mind to quit. Must be second nature to me, for I didn't know I was doing it. But I stop that here and now! Get me?"

"I get you, pard," Kelly answered.

"I mean it," Borden said, conclusively, going in the direction of the company store.

VIII

THE TOUCH OF LOVE

GENE found her hands very full. The wound of the Queen healed slowly. For days she lay pale and wistful, pensively thankful for every kindness. With her recovery came clearer eyes and a purer skin. Slowly the traces of sin left her face, and a look of peace made her good to see. She had been very weary, and this time of quiet had come in which she might rest. She had been very thirsty, moving over a vast desert of sand and sun, where cruel spines slashed her feet, but unexpectedly she had entered a cool valley full of shadows and fountains. Back there, she had come to weigh all things in the scales of flesh, and to doubt the motives of those who touched her life; but in a night the old ideality had come back. Faint as a lost will-o'-the-wisp at first, it is true, but growing stronger each day. Out there in the ditches of excess she had lain a dead thing among the dead. But there had come a resurrection, a life-giving touch—the touch of love.

Aunt Ruth had ventured out under the pines, needle-work in hand, and some crackers for the squirrel which lived in the trees. Gene put the cabin in order, placed her father's slippers where they should be, polished the stove, and put new papers on the shelves. Then she drew a chair close to the bed where the Queen lay. The girl turned her wistful eyes on her face, and smiled.

"How kind you have been," she began, almost timidly. "I know I should have died in that place if you had not come. I shall live because you have cared for me so well. But I wanted to die; I prayed to die—but not there."

Gene put her hand on the girl's forehead with a caressing touch.

"You are too young to die, Minnie. Life holds much for you that is good. I want you to get well—to get strong, and you will. You must get hope back. They have treated you very cruelly, Minnie; they have put many stripes upon your heart. But you must forget and forgive that. It must all come to be a dark, vague dream to you, in which you see yourself walking as in a mist. Remember that spring by spring the flowers open and the birds sing. Out there the blue-eyed grass is a-love, and the Mariposa lilies pray together in the glades. These are all for you."

"For me?" the girl repeated, drawing the hand from her forehead to her lips.

"Yes, for you, Minnie, and their message is one of hope and peace. See the sunshine flooding through the door; it comes in wherever we give it a chance. Down in the glades the white streams are singing with crystal lips the endless song of the love of God. I hear praise in the pine-tops, and devotion in the laurel, and the Man divine comes walking upon the golden waves of light. Oh, it's all so beautiful, Minnie, so wide and tender! The streams rush to the sea with their freight of poison, and the salt heart of the ocean takes out the impurity and sends them back in snowstorms and summer rain. Think of these things, Minnie, and you will forget—that way we can all forget—that you were sent to the ocean of love to be washed, for you will walk among us in white. You understand me, dear . . . I mean we can all forget that we have gone down impure, but remember with gladness that we came back the snow."

The girl wept in soft, sweet grief. "You are so good and pure, Miss Truxton, I wonder that you touched me. When I see you going about, your face full of its strange, wonderful beauty, and your bright hair falling about your head, it seems I am watching something that

does not belong to this world. Look at me! I sent my soul in the way of Cain; I have lived among dragons in a dragonish land; I have drunk deeply from the poisoned waters and my brain has reeled. But you . . . your eyes are like water, the white waters in the glades, and your soul as the quartz crystal. Oh, if only I could be like you. Can I ever have that look I see in your face? I had it once, but a cloud blotted out the light; an unclean hand smeared the slate of my heart."

Gene put her hand over the girl's lips.

"You must not say such things about me, Minnie, for I'm not an angel; I am very far from that. I try to be good, but I have no reason to boast. Had my lot been yours, how would the story read? With my nature, it would doubtless be far worse. But be sure your eyes will get like the water if you live for it. Really, dear, they are that way now. You are pretty, Minnie, and when you know the bursting of the inner fountain along all the channels of your life, then will flash the crystal and appear the snow. The shadows will go out of your face and you will be your old self again."

"How beautiful and full of hope your words are! But tell me how this can be." The girl waited eagerly.

"Into the vases of your life you have gathered weeds and nightshade; let us throw out the weeds and bring in lilies. You have sat with vultures by carrion—we all have—but now you must walk the uplands where the larks of holiness sing, and white doves of purity will fly to your windows."

"It is so, Miss Truxton; the grass and the water and the rain don't seem to know we have sinned, and the sun never pays any attention to what we have done. I lived once in an alley. There were heaps of rubbish, and a place where swine bedded at night. It was foul with stench and clutter. As I sat there it began to snow, and I watched till the soft white had covered all those scars with a healing of purity. I was lonely, and I cried, for I knew my heart was like that alley. Then I put out my hands and the crystals fell upon them. I wanted to be like them, and I said it into the feathery cloud. But I thought it impossible."

"God is like that," Gene replied fervently.

"He must be, for he made the snow!"

"Look at those cherry flowers in the window, those shadows under the pines, those sun-drenched glades. All these are trying to teach us something of the great love which has spared us, and which hovers over us always. You must just lie here and let the breeze come in

and kiss you; he's an ardent lover, but a pure one. You must tell the sunshine your longings, for it will understand, and it will pour gold on your hair. And sometime, when a very deep and tender moment melts on your heart its holy meaning, then talk to God; tell him all, and the breast of Christ will rest your head like your mother's once did."

"Oh, that is so beautiful! So beautiful! But I have been bad, very bad. You can't understand . . . if you only could!"

"Tell me—tell me all," Gene prompted, knowing that the heart heals more quickly after being emptied of its clots.

"You will shudder, I know. But I have felt that I would be farther from it all if I did confess it out of my conscience. But you must be like the sunshine and the flowers out there, and not mind."

"I will understand," Gene answered, as she took the girl's thin hand in hers. "You know, Minnie, evil is not so far from any of us that we need to deny the introduction. We neighbor with it, and have it for guest at all seasons. We have not all gone the more rugged way, yet I am sure most of our decisions for or against right are conditioned upon circumstances. Life is filled with moments, tense moments, which, like acorns, are capable of vast births. I have

thought that love, truth and hope are things which have their seasons. They break through the soil of the heart, and, once rooted, they will grow in spite of wind or tide. Sometimes we arrive at strange crossings—misty crossings—when we can scarcely guess to what the dim way may lead. The greatest sin is choosing to follow the wrong way after we have learned the right one.”

“I have done that, too,” confessed the Queen, brokenly.

“We all have been guilty of the same thing.”

The Queen was quiet for some time. Then she turned to Gene with a weary little sigh.

“Will you be like the rain if I tell you?”

“And the snow,” Gene added, holding the girl’s hand very close and warm.

“It is dark, very dark. You will not always understand. I do not. The pages are blotted. Since being hurt, I have seen myself down there in those dark years, and I have wondered if it could be me. I seem to have been watching the foolishness of some one else. If only I could have had a sister, a brother. But I was alone, and sent adrift so young. Oh, I have seen and felt so much! Days of half sleep and nights of revelry; and always I see lines of swinish men, drinking, drinking, drinking! That seemed the devil’s best joke. In my ears now is the bellow-

ing and the blasphemy. I shudder—I am glad I do—for I was there among them.”

The Queen hesitated, and her eyes showed that she was thinking. Gathering courage from the pressure of Gene's hand, she went on bravely to the end of the story—the strange, tragic, mournful story, so like all others, and yet so different. Here and there the curtain was well lifted. Again, there was but a partial glimpse, a suggestion which spoke more than the detail would have conveyed. When the story was done, the lashes of both women were wet. With a mutual movement and impulse they drew together, and Gene folded the girl in her arms. Slipping to her knees, while the Queen wept after the manner of women, Gene breathed low, burning words of pleading into the ear of Him who attends the funeral of all sparrows that fall. There could be no mistake in this. Gene was conscious that her own spirit was flowing unhindered to love's best center, and that every sphere was trembling with willing and desireful answer. The Queen sobbed softly, and The Color, who had slipped in just at the right time, kissed them both impulsively.

IX

LAUGHING BROOKIE

THE lessons at the old powder cabin had gone on regularly, and The Color had astonished her teacher with her capacity for work and her aptness to understand. In fact, so persistent had been her application that Gene found it necessary to caution her against overdoing.

Already there was a marked change in her language, and she grasped the problems given her with a vim good to see. A tie of friendship formed between teacher and pupil which was deep and lasting. Gene saw all the buds of promise bursting into bloom in the wild heart of the girl, and she rejoiced over her.

But it was to music that she turned with the supremest passion. She reveled in it, threw her soul into it, measure by measure.

It was the hour for study, and the two women went up the trail, leaving the Queen alone. With a strange peace upon her, she lay looking out at the blossoming cherry and the cool pines, with the blue hills beyond.

"Jim says I am getting along all right," The Color began.

"You are, dear, and I am proud of you."

"But I am beginning to see that there is more than just knowing things. You know everything, it seems, and yet you don't put that first . . . you are always doing something for some one else. See how you have helped the Queen. I am beginning to see that making others happy is the greatest thing in the world."

"You are right. Doing good is the greatest science of all, and truth is knowledge. Learn to pity, and to seek the joy of others, and you will have found the best things in life."

"Jim has talked about that to me, but not just that way. I think his mother told him good things, for he knows about them. But I wish he would quit going to the saloons. He don't get drunk, but I—I—wish he wouldn't." The girl turned and gazed with unseeing eyes down into the warm valley, where the streams wound between banks fringed with the airy grace of willows.

"Let us hope he will," Gene replied, drawing the girl into the cabin.

"I know where we can do some good," the girl suggested, changing from her pensive mood to one of sparkling interest. "Old Brookie is sick over there in his cabin. 'Laughing Brookie,'

the boys call him, because he is so jolly. He has a dog that does tricks in the saloons, and that's the way he gets his drinks and something to eat."

"I'll go and see him to-day; and if I can do anything for him I will. Poor old fellow, one never knows how such have come to what they are. It is easy to go down-hill when started."

In the afternoon Gene and The Color crossed the stream and followed the path up to the old man's cabin. He received them with cordial surprise.

"I reckon I know you, first off. You're the gal the chap called Nugget down in the saloon that night you went after the Luck Queen, ain't ye?"

Gene acknowledged that he was right.

"Well, what sort of a gal are ye, anyway, lookin' after such folks as her and me? I've heerd of angels, but I always had my doubts about them. Begin to think I'm wrong, though." The old man lay quietly watching Gene as she went deftly through the cabin, bringing order out of chaos as only the hand of a woman can.

Day by day the visits were made. Sometimes The Color went along; oftener Gene went alone, till, once more on his cane, Laughing Brookie hobbled down to the Bald Eagle and

sang the praise of the "Angel O' Deadman," who had nursed him back to life. The new term took, and the native sentiment, which is to be found in the breasts of rugged and chesty men, lingered over the pleasing term. It was repeated around the fires of the miners, and instantly took permanent place in the unwritten poetry of the hills. Many a shaggy circle is stirred and made tender when some silent miner, who has been gazing into the fire for an hour, suddenly speaks out some bit of choice sentiment; which, contrasted with his ordinary moods and manner of expression, is like a ruby in a bank of black sand. It was Laughing Brookie, a by-word and a clown, who coined the name "Angel O' Deadman"; and it was a thousand more like him who gave it permanent place in their speech.

There had been reminiscent moments when the old man spoke of the past and long-lost friends. Out of the treasuries of the years he brought sacred things, and Gene, sitting by him in the long, delicious afternoons, listened to the tale of a heart which had known its woundings.

When she learned, through Kelly and The Color, that the old man was back in the Bald Eagle, she was sad. When she protested, he looked at her in a puzzled way, and replied after his own manner:

"Reckon it does look bad to you, Miss, but that's the only thing I've known for forty years. Man can't stay in his cabin all the time, and the saloon becomes his home. There he meets the boys and the stir of things. Ain't any other place for an old loafer like me to go. There I meet my own kind, the chaps of the trail and the grass, and sometimes a drink is good."

"Don't say that! See what it has done for you, and the rest," she protested.

"That's so, gal, that's so. It gits us in the end. I know that, and have for many a day. If there was any other place to go, reckon I would; but there ain't, and a feller's got to go somewhere."

"You say if there was some other place to go, you would?" Gene was thinking fast.

"Why, yes, I reckon so, if it was a place where an old bacon-eater like me could meet the boys."

She made no further reply, but her mind was busy with plans for the future as she went down the hill.

X

THE SONG OF THE STEEL

SLOWLY the days went by.

Borden had passed through many moods. Filled constantly with the thought of Gene Truxton and a wish to be near her, he had experienced intermittent eruptions of rebellion against the element which had entered into his life and seemed determined to bring him into captivity. Yet—strange paradox!—he found himself improving every opportunity to become completely lost in the sweet, sad power.

When the fire burned low in the cabin and Jim's heavy breathing told him that the care-free Hibernian was asleep, he sat thinking, thinking, following the shadowy form which walked the cloudland of his soul with her white feet shod in disquieting sandals.

In these moments Gene Truxton seemed very far from him. With soul clearness he knew that he should not confuse her approachableness with a more serious feeling. There was a wide stretch of uncertain ground between them. About the strong, pure girl there was a mesh of

haunting mystery which wrapped her round like the shining of stars, leaving her remote as twilight and intangible as music on water. In her presence he found that he was generally confused, eager or rebellious; yet he ever committed himself more fully to this strange stream, which was sweeping him he could not guess where.

If Gene had opened her eyes wide at the discoveries she had made when she saw Borden confront with cold joy the ponderous hulk of the gorilla, far more had Borden marveled at the things he had discovered in her.

He tried to classify by a miner's method what he saw in her eyes, but the truth escaped him. There were times when an unconscious yielding, a playful mood on her part, disarmed him. Yet within a minute all this might pass and a strange reserve settle between them which he could not analyze. Perhaps she was amused at him. The thought brought an oath to his lips. It might be she thought him an interesting specimen of the local male gender; if so, he would have all the Truxtons in the world know that he, too, had read books and had traveled. If he chose to be himself, and if the salt Bohemian smacked good in his mouth, all that was his own business. It might be that she looked upon him as a savage. Possibly the Bald Eagle

life had come to mean less to him in an immoral way than to those who were strange to it, but he had not lost the bearings of his manhood, and he, too, could boast somewhat if he would. Still, Borden was well aware that the thing which separated them more than anything else was her firm conviction of right. That she never would consent to anything that was low or unworthy he knew, and his desire to remove all that might separate them widened into something of a moral adjustment which he began to be willing to make.

In the end, all this was good for Borden, for it led him to a careful review of his life. Things which had assumed the positions of pride and worth gradually sank to common faults which it would be as well to cast aside. Thus, feverish and ill at ease, he lived the days, growing more and more restless and taciturn.

Jim watched his partner with feelings of wonder, yet, true to that native breeding which goes with men who dwell together, he asked no unwelcome questions. In moments of abstraction, when Borden ceased without reason to strike the drill or leaned on the car at the dump and looked with unseeing eyes into the blue distance, he said nothing, for he believed he understood. Gradually Jim came to show his partner

little favors, as we do those who have been sick or have fallen into sorrow; and, when he could, took upon himself the heavier tasks.

There was one thing which afforded Jim some quiet amusement—the fact that Borden requested his most sentimental songs. While he sang them, his partner would sit with eyes on the fire and make no comments. Borden had taken to walking under the pines in the moonlight. To his feverish spirit there was something soothing in this, and the mountain winds in the pines told him of a sorrow which he wished to hear.

The Fourth of July drew on, and it became a problem to Kelly how he could arouse Borden from the listless mood into which he had fallen. There was much practicing to be done for the contest in which they were to engage, and neglect meant defeat. Deadman came behind no city in its loyalty to all popular events, and the camp planned a thrilling celebration. Of course, as it always had been, Boulder Bar, a rival camp for county honors and trade, had issued challenges, which Deadman accepted. The towns had kept about the same pace in growth and wealth, and were in the same class as to situation. It followed, therefore, that the things said by the editor of the *Deadman Prospect* or against the

editor of the *Boulder Bar Times* were mostly creations of overheated brains in view of the love of gain.

The war between the editors, who, by the way, felt themselves the defenders of all the individual interests of the two camps, led to innumerable saloon brawls and battered heads.

The year before, Deadman had lost the contest for fast drilling to Boulder Bar by the margin of three inches. This had led to a year of incrimination between the papers which the people of the respective camps came to consider their individual opinions. This disgrace must be wiped out, but Deadman would have need to worry, for the rival camp claimed the swiftest driller in the hills. This wonder was known among his backers as Cornish Lightning.

Against this prodigy Borden had been chosen to appear in the coming contest, and he had entered into the matter with characteristic energy. But, upon the coming of the new force into his life, he had half forgotten it all, growing indifferent to the matter in the deeper things which absorbed him. Jim saw this and grew impatient. There was much to be worked out. They must learn how to change drills quickly; cease turning to strike, cease striking to turn. All this required practice, and plenty

of it; but so far he had failed to get Borden interested.

At this critical juncture Jim worked out a scheme by which to stir the iron in his partner's soul. As was his habit, he carried his troubles to The Color, and that piquant girl believed that if she could suggest to Borden that Gene Truxton was to watch the contest he would come to himself.

Kelly planned to have The Color innocently communicate the fact the next day. Meeting them as they went up the trail the following morning, the girl rallied Borden confidently, yet assured him that the man who defeated the Cornish Lightning would have to know the stroke. It all came in naturally enough. Gene would be there. Superintendent Truxton, being on the committee of arrangements, had seen to it that the women would have front seats near the contestants. It worked perfectly. Borden awoke that very day. Jim smiled. Nothing was done in the tunnel, but a dozen boulders around it had strange holes in them that night.

A contest never fails to draw a crowd. The Fourth arrived, clear and cool, and found all the committees in their places with their work well in hand. Deadman took on extra fever. Every vein of it seethed with bubbling blood.

Animal spirits spilled over, dominant and raw. The crawling streams of men moved a little quicker along their sidewalk channels. Down every trail came chesty knights of the pick and shovel, clad in clean blue flannel shirts, well open at the throat, and canvas overalls. The swing of them was good, the dare of them was a zest, their eyes were so many challenges.

Stormy spirits thronged the saloons, lined the bars and swarmed around the games. The quiet of the cabin and the monotony of the drift were left behind. Their hardy spirits panted for excitement as for new wine. Certain it was there would be much of it in Deadman before the day should close.

At an early hour crowds began to pour in from Boulder Bar. There was a becoming display of flags and bunting on all hands. The spot chosen for the contests was on a small level at the bend of the canyon, where the cool of the mountain lay on the air like a benediction. A large booth of green boughs had been erected, under which those to have part in the try-outs were seated. Facing this three-sided theater were the seats for the women, all filled at an early hour. From that quarter came ripples of laughter and ceaseless thrills of light talk. In the front sat Gene Truxton, between The Color

and the Queen, her winsome face strong in its clear beauty.

Borden swept them with a glance full of admiration, yet cool self-possession. Their eyes met. Borden's were flashing with the spirit of contest; Gene's were warm, and flying the banners of encouragement. At the sight of the three women sitting together there was a buzz of comment. Swiftly it passed from man to man that this was the girl who had nursed the Queen back to life, and had given old Brookie a new chance, besides what she had done for The Color.

Comment in undertone flowed copiously, and all took time to study the girl, who sat with quiet eyes watching the preparations for the coming struggle, her hands held by her companions.

"Ain't that the girl that Old Lucky called a Nugget, down in the Bald Eagle saloon, the night Borden whipped Burke?"

"You bet it is! That's the time she went to get the Queen, when she was shot by Frenchie. Say, fellows, take a look at the girl—I mean the one who was shot, Minnie Moore—she looks different, eh?" Jack Harrington spoke with his usual dash, and a dozen miners agreed with him.

"There's more'n that can be said of her," put

in Laughing Brookie, introducing himself with his customary chuckle. "She's the gal what came up and nursed an old loafer like me back to life when I had begun to think I was goin' off shift. There I was, 'ceptin' Trix—Trix is my dog, mister—and no one seemed to care whether old Brookie stopped his laughin' or not. Well, I say, there I was, just thinkin'—thinkin' about all sorts of things; wonderin' if the claim had paid for workin' it—when in came that gal with a smile that made me think o' my mother's. God bless her!" Brookie's voice broke, and he recovered himself with a laugh.

"Oh, I had a good mother, boys, that I did! She taught me right, but I didn't take her advice, and here I am, an old loafer, rotted with whisky and livin' by the tricks of a dog. Well, as I was sayin', in walked that gal, lookin' like a wild rosebush in bloom, and she came right up to the bunk and said a lot o' things that made me feel that death was afraid of her, and that I'd have to get well. Why, think of it! She took my boots out from under my head and gave me a big, white pillar—hadn't put my head on one in thirty year—I was almost afraid of it. Then she hauled off those old blankets o' mine and put on some that looked like they'd been snowed, they was so white. Then she had Harrington here give me a wash-up, the first in

twenty years, 'ceptin' that time I fell in Feather River; and she put things on me, clean and soft, I didn't s'pose anybody but women wore, and I got them on yit.

"Next, she went through that cabin! And I swear, boys, she found things I never saw before. Well, sir, it seemed she jist brought life and sunshine in with her, and in five days I was loafin' on a bench outside, and eatin' things she cooked, which I hain't the faintest notion what they was. 'Well,' sez I to myself, 'that gal ain't like no gal I ever seed before in the mountains,' and I jest naturally called her an angel. 'The Angel O' Deadman.' The name Old Lucky give to her is fair; but mine's nigher the facts.

"Why, look at her there between them two gals. The Color was always the right sort, but the Queen . . . we all know that the Queen has been gatherin' the primroses. But there she is, holdin' the Queen's hand 'zif she had never got her out'n a saloon. The Queen looks a sight different since she was shot. I tell ye, boys, a lot could be said about the Angel O' Deadman.

"And she ain't a bit proud; no, sir. I'll bet you the drinks that if I go over there and speak to her she will be glad to see me, and she'll shake with me!" Brookie looked a blanket

challenge at the crowd, laughed, and walked to where Gene was sitting, her eyes raised to the green shoulders of the hill, where a shadow was growing less under a great rock.

As the old man approached, she rose and gave him her hand with a frank smile. Borden saw the action and admired it. Brookie returned to his company triumphant.

"What'd I tell ye, boys!" he chuckled, shouldering among them.

"You gave her about the right name, Brookie," commented Harrington, looking from the face of the Queen to the calm one beside it.

"Might as well consider that recorded," Brookie piped.

"It's a go!" from many voices.

Thus the story of the strange girl of Dead-man took wings. Around the camp-fire of the packers the tale was rehearsed, while the wondering men gazed into the flames. In the cabins, and at noon in the shaft, men leaned on their picks or sat upon their bunks to discuss the merits of the girl whose pure touch had seemed to come to them all. They had known the girl of the dance-hall, and they were, in their own way, glad for the change in her. Miners walked by her cabin to get a glimpse of her face, and in the night-time wan sisters of the ancient master of the Jews came for help and encour-

agement. In his travels—dog at heels—Brookie had rehearsed the tale of his recovery and the change in the Queen in all the neighboring camps, till the Angel of Deadman came to be a hallowing something which charmed the hills with a haunting, deathless glory. Down the dim years to come, men would sit by other fire-sides and tell their children the story of the one who cast a charm over that long-lost time, while the embers would fall to ashes and the forms fade out of the flame.

In the afternoon there were to be jumping, putting the shot, races and other features. But the morning had two events: putting up the weight and the drilling contest. The crowd surged in close and tense as Superintendent Truxton announced that all was ready. Burke, representing Deadman, stepped into the open. He was in condition. His blue flannel shirt was open at the throat, and the right sleeve was rolled up to the shoulder. Opposed to him was Big Mike, of Boulder Bar; Burke's equal in weight, and the winner in a hundred contests. This was their proud moment. Each had heard much of the other, and they had panted for a try-out.

Both factions cheered wildly as their respective champions met and shook hands. Big Mike balanced the weight on his hand, and then

the great arm went up under a hundred and fifty pounds. Who could beat it! Down came the thundering applause from the Boulder Bar crowd. Voices were heard calling for bets at two to one on Mike. This was promptly checked by Superintendent Truxton, who quoted the rules of the day.

The gorilla stood smiling and confident. He knew what slept in his shoulder. There was a dragon, wide awake, in his forearm. The spirit of the neck shook him like a maned lion. He was happy. What he had lost by his defeat at the hands of Borden he would take back from this swaggering opponent. This was his hour of redemption, and he could not fail. Gene studied the giant, and her admiration grew for Borden.

Turning half round as the weight—a stamp from a quartz-mill—was rolled toward him, Burke looked the crowd over with a smile, as if to ask, “Did you say something about Burke not being a man?” Then with an easy motion he lifted the weight several times from the ground. Those watching him saw his muscles swell under the test. Straightening up, he rubbed his hands together, tightened the roll at his shoulder, then, stooping like a bent tree, he set the weight upon the center of his hand, and, heaving like a bull, shoved it splendidly to full

arm's length above his head, held it there while he turned toward all parts of the crowd, then heaved it from him, the weight dropping at the rim of the Boulder Bar faction—it weighed two hundred pounds. The mountains rocked to the applause from all sides.

The drilling contest came next. Borden and Kelly sat quietly watching while their opponents arranged their drills and syphon, which consisted of an oil-can turned upon its side and a rubber tube placed so water would run directly into the hole made by the drill. In this way the rock dust would be carried out. The drills lay in a fan-like spread close at hand, arranged according to their length. These would be traded in and out of the deepening hole.

Borden measured Cornish Lightning with the eye of an expert. He matched his reputation. Tawny and wire-knit, he moved with perfect confidence in his ability to meet all comers. Frankly his eyes met Borden's, and there was challenge in them. The mate of Cornish Lightning was second only to him. He stood, sure in the ability of his companion, smiling and co-operative. Back of this pair was a rosary of victories. It had been their swift-handed work which swept the honor of Deadman into the dust the year

before. Much preparation had been made, but the result showed Deadman defeated by several inches. Now these victors of the hills stood smiling, confident, awaiting the word.

Side by side, Borden and Kelly had seen the flag of the camp struck to these men; and that night they had talked it over in the cabin, agreeing that they would take the time necessary for practice, and challenge them for another try-out. Then had followed wild drillings, in which they had behaved exactly as if a crowd stood about them and they were contending for the lost honor, till they boasted to each other that they could strike to the steel with their eyes shut. This regular practice had been interrupted only once, and a woman's face was the disconcerting thing.

The four men shook hands, roughly frank, and clearly at peace with one another. The hour had come. The crowd forced the ropes to the last inch of space. Brookie laughed and swore by turns, as men stepped on the feet of his dog. Gene bent tensely forward, eager, excited. She loved contest—strength; she admired strong men; she worshiped courage. She saw the embedded boulder and the fan of drills—the can, waiting to gurgle its aid. With fascination she watched Cornish Lightning take up

a sledge and balance it airily in his hands; to him it was as the name he bore.

She watched with quickened breath the other man kneel and set the drill, his hand on the syphon; saw her father, watch in hand, step forward. He was reminiscently and presently happy. Then her eyes went to Borden. He stood with folded arms, as did Kelly. Both men were dressed in dark pantaloons and soft white shirts, with the sleeves cut away at the elbows. Borden turned and looked at her, and she caught his glance and tried to flash him encouragement. His dark hair lay in tumult over his head, and his arms showed pink-white where she could see the skin. The joy of contest was on him, and he looked godlike in his fitness.

The crowd tensed to silence. It is only the cheaper moods which permit of words. Then came the one word:

“Ready?”

“Time!”

The sledge smashed the drill, and before the minute closed three inches of hole had been made in the rock. From his corner Borden watched the work of the men. It was perfect, if they could hold the pace. They worked together like parts of a machine. They even chatted of some matter . . . not a blow missed,

and the "chuck-chuck" of the drill was like the time in music. The steel teeth bit deep. Up and down they changed from holding to striking. Bright beads appeared on their faces, and from the overwrought crowd came such things as: "Wild wings!" "Look out for the Chinks!" "Don't let your drill drop through!"

Borden watched his opponents with glance candor-keen. Two things he noted: they were slightly overconfident, and they struck a little too light for the fiber of the rock. This stone yielded best when the drill was driven with titan force. This the others should have discovered.

Like heartbeats the minutes passed. Deeper and deeper gnawed the drill. Out of the crowd came a deep-drawn breath. One minute was left. The last drill went into the fearfully deep hole with a chuck, and a shower of blows sang on the end of it.

"Time!" Fifteen minutes of lightning, and the men stood back washed with sweat. Forty inches of crystals had been cut out. Could any two men beat that in such stones? The crowd went into pandemonium. All factions gave acknowledgment of the work. Boulder Bar surged in and lifted their heroes to their shoulders, bearing them in a circle around the booth; then three cheers went up to the cliffs.

"Do as I do," Borden whispered to Kelly.

"Not too light—hard! and strike so fast the devil can't count you—understand?"

Kelly nodded, and they took their places. A wild cheer of encouragement went up from the Deadman faction. Laughing Brookie haw-hawed, and Old Lucky swore that Boulder Bar had been matched at last. The crowd became silent. Even the shuffling of feet ceased.

"Is there anything in that rock you want forty inches below the surface?" Cornish Lightning bantered at Borden.

"No," was Borden's suggestive reply.

Gene heard the banter and sent a look at the overconfident miner. But he was watching Borden and did not see it.

"Don't Jim look fine?" whispered The Color, delighted. The Irishman had just given her a glance and a smile.

Gene turned from Borden to his companion. "He does seem in good condition for the test," she answered, wondering that any one could fail to see that Borden was a model for a sculptor.

Gene had known men before desks, behind pulpits and between plow-handles. She had heard them charge one another's bulwarks with the cavalry of speech, and crumble down strongholds of theories with the artillery of logic. But now she was seeing man in his elemental glory—

matched and mated, limb to limb, chest to chest, muscle to muscle; and the new vision wrought in her a subtle change—made her partisan. Already she was quaking, lest her champion should not win. Her breast heaved, and her breathing was like one with a fever. Her eyes were astral with excitement, and her parted lips and carnation cheeks made her appear like a startled nymph listening to the pipings of love in the forest enchanted.

Superintendent Truxton stepped to place. Gene saw the two men collect themselves with a tense motion, and wait.

“Ready?” The sledge in Borden’s hand floated to place.

“Time!”

The first blow came feeling its way to the drill-head with a pattern-setting movement. Then the speed gradually increased till the singing sledge formed a glittering bow in the air and the smitten steel streamed fire.

“Give it h—l!” yelled a partisan for Deadman, who was promptly silenced by Jack Harrington, who never got beyond his knowledge of the presence of women.

Old Lucky saw fit to pass a remark as well:

“Shut up your yap! Don’t you suppose Paul Borden and Jim Kelly know enough to do that without you tellin’ ’em?”

"Purty work! Purty work!" came from the crowd, as the blows streamed precisely on the whirling drill, the chuck of which was as the regularity of a clock.

Never had the crowd seen such physical endurance, such lightning strokes. It was a revelation. The two men conserved every ounce of their energy. Nor were words spoken between them. They became a perfect whirlwind of blows, every one of which sent the drill with a crunching sound deeper into the gored rock. Up and down, with the regularity of a swift shaft, they changed from striker to turner—from turner to striker.

Borden had figured it all out as he sat watching from his corner, and he struck the blow that would give the steel the greatest bite. Experienced miners were quick to see this, and began to impart their discovery by grins and nods at their companions. Chesty and full, Brookie's laugh rolled over the crowd, and was answered by a cheer which startled an eagle from a crag a half-mile above. Cornish Lightning leaned forward:

"God! Matched at last!" he exclaimed.

Sweat streamed from the bodies of the two men. Their shirts were as if dipped in a spring. Drops like rain fell out of their hair, but there was no lessening of the strokes, and the tops of

the drills smoked with friction heat. Excitement thrilled through the crowd. Men leaned like trees in a wind. Faster, if possible, fell the sledges; in and out came the drills with a sureness which astonished all who saw it. Through this crash of metal on metal rang the voice of Superintendent Truxton calling the time.

Gene felt her own blood bounding through her. Intensely she wished that Borden and Kelly might win. Just why she had become so partisan she could not have said. After all, reason is but the thermometer indicating the temperatures of the soul. Gene Truxton was logical enough. It had been one of her best qualities of mind that she could bring everything to a sane test. But the highest knowledge is the intuitive, and correlated to this is the sub-conscious. Love, longing, repulsion are motive forces which stir reason with a feathery wing where it sleeps at the end of the way. Reason is a fact-monger, putting the truths of being into the archives of the spirit. It was enough just now for Gene Truxton to know that she wished victory for Deadman very much, and that it would be sweet, that thunder of applause which hung at the lip of the crowd.

One minute and a half of exertion remained for each man. Already their veins stood out like whipcord and their muscles as knotted

ropes. Men gulped and waited for the one false stroke, the one broken drill, or erratic sledge turning in tired hands, but they saw them not. Grim and silent the two men fought on, sending the drill song high and clear as it ate its way towards the under-soil and—victory. Quick and sure Borden changed the last drill but one, while Kelly fought its head like a madman. Time was called for the last change. Borden struck his first blow as Kelly reached the drill. Then followed a sleet of blows, a storm of energy. The crowd girded itself. The psychology of it fused into one great fact—Deadman would win. Expression followed—came as a cloudburst: “Hurrah for Deadman! Hurrah! Hurrah!”

Gene could have joined in the shout; oh, that she might!

“Send her through, old man, send her through!”

But Borden did not need the urging, for with all his strength he was straining to penetrate the rock. Fifteen seconds were left him—twenty blows. Could he do it? Already the first ripple of the coming crash, the first rumble of the thunder-clap, broke from the edge of the crowd. Then came a dull, toneless sound, and the drill shot from sight, followed by the sledge, which struck a cloud of powdered rock from the

surface of the boulder—the stone had been pierced.

“Time!” shouted Superintendent Truxton, and Borden stood straight, the sledge floating to a ready position. Deadman had won by a known eight inches. The storm broke. There was a whirl of surging forms, and Gene found herself standing, with The Color dancing about her declaring the skill and success of James Kelly.

Borden stood radiating physical force, his clear skin streaming sweat and his matted hair gathered in tumult over his head. No woman could be true to her sex and not glory in such strength and fitness, and Gene Truxton was a true woman, made for love—love at birth had kissed her lips, her eyes and forehead, and dedicated her to pure passion, uttering a prophecy over her bright hair, which always reminded Borden of the sun on brown leaves. He turned as if drawn to her and their eyes met. His were full of banked fires and asking; hers were alight with admiration. In that instant the crowd surged in, swept both men from their feet, and bore them away like drift on a mountain river.

From the scene of the contest, Gene walked home through the scented woods, in her heart a delicious pain. That night, after the Queen

had sunk into a restful slumber, Gene lay awake watching the fretted moonlight hang the pines with lace. Deep things had come to her for weighing—things that she could not understand. Misty paths wound away before her. To what enchanted land they led she could not even guess. At last sleep came to her, but not till she had clearly settled upon her course of action. This had evidently cost something, for tears hung upon her lashes.

XI

THE LAKE OF SEVEN MOONS

IT will be perfectly delightful, and don't you dare refuse!" The Color threw her arms about Gene's neck impulsively. "There won't be just we two. Minnie will go—won't you, Minnie?" The Queen nodded her willingness. "There! And a lot of the mine-owners will take their wives. But I won't go one step, unless you do!"

The tone of the girl's voice indicated that Gene Truxton was inclined to reckon herself out of the party which was forming for the upper valley, with its blue lakes and wading islands, nestling like parts of a broken mirror under the white cliffs.

Gene did not reply at once, but sat with a pensive light in her eyes, which were lifted to the crumpled ranges beyond. She was thinking—thinking the mystery thoughts of a woman's soul, while fancy wove strange fabrics for her heart.

With a little start she became conscious of the importunity of the girl beside her.

"Why, Miss Truxton, what have you been looking at? One would think you had been watching angels." The Color looked deep into the eyes raised to hers. The Queen rose and went to the window, where she stood for a time looking down on the sprawl of the unconforming camp and the rough honesty of the cabins. With a little sigh she left the window and came to Gene's side, who seemed too much occupied with her own thoughts to formulate an answer to The Color. Without a word Minnie moved her hand under the bright cloud of her hair, stealing it around the soft curve of Gene's neck, and stood stroking the firm, warm flesh, while her own eyes grew misty.

Suddenly the Queen grew tense. Stooping, she whispered something which none but Gene could hear. When she stood erect once more, The Color saw that a change had come to her—she was different. Where a moment before there had been pensiveness, there was now victory. On her forehead had settled the rarest of crowns—the halo of unselfishness and gratitude.

It worked out as The Color desired. In fact, that impulsive young woman was in the habit of having her way, whether it was contending with old Sluicy over his habits or the owner of the Bald Eagle for supplying him with liquor. Yet, even The Color would admit that this was the duel

of her life, but she obtained the promise at last.

It was the time of full moon, and the deer fed throughout the night. The mountain land was deep in green. Aspen and balm whispered together in woodland mystery over the streams. High on the white cliffs the wild goats were at play, and shambling bear came down to the cabbage thickets in the canyons. The blue swoon of summer had settled on the hills, making them remote, elusive.

It was the season for rest, for love and dreams, and Gene finally entered into the plans for a week at the lakes with considerable spirit. The Color was delighted and the Queen acquiescent. She had expressed herself as willing to remain at the cabin, if her presence would cause any comment among the campers. To this Gene had emphatically objected, declaring that if the Queen was not one of the number, on terms of perfect equality, then she would refuse to go. Good eyes had Minnie Moore, now cleared of the bale-fires of sin, but never did they shine with so rare a light as now; and Gene remembered it through all the heartful days afterwards. Remembered it, when far mists lay on the hills and lone blue pines.

The party consisted of several mine-owners with their families; a half-dozen promoters, their wives and friends; with gay, flirting Jack

Harrington, debonair and single, the king of Vagabondia, and wind-jammer around a hundred horns. Over the Seven Seas he had come sailing to the last frontier. Bohemian to the core, he moved, pole and center, among his kind, holding by his dash and self-conceit these circling moons, who influenced him only to raise and lower the tides of his soul when good Burgundy helped in the pull. Travel-chipped, he dropped with equal grace the compliment or the challenge. His slim fingers had waked the string under Italian moons, when the nightingales mourned in the olive groves and the gondoliers chanted on the bay. There was brown on his cheek, from the Trades, and in his eyes passion, stirred by the dark orbs of maids in Arabian woods. Such Sherines had looked upon him, flooded him with the shadowy fire of their glances, leaving him the child of vanity and a false conception of woman. Such was Jack Harrington, who, out of a whim, had concluded to make one of the party. As is the custom with his stamp, he learned from the casting of dice all the facts he considered worth knowing. In this way he decided his changes, the possibility of success in his latest love venture, the chance for foul weather which sometimes came. Opinions which are based on license, or are the product of liberty in moral

things, are always subject to sudden and surprising revelations. All such go down, soon or late, toppling tower and reeling wall. Jack Harrington had made place for no reverses; for, from the myrrh groves of Attica to the slumbrous cocoa isles, women had wept him their truant fate, and had wrung their hands while his ship spread her white wings like a bird to waft him to other shores.

Gene had conceived the plan of taking the overworked Mrs. Sluicy with her, and, to make this possible, had arranged with another woman to care for the boarders while she was away. The frayed dresses were laid aside and comfortable gowns procured. The Color laughed and cried by turns at the good fortune of her adopted mother, filling all moods with outbursts of gratitude for the one who had made all this possible.

"Oh, it's going to be splendid—glorious!" The Color exclaimed, using the best adjectives she knew. "Why, think of it! Jim has agreed to go, for he says I would get drowned in the lake sure if he were not there to take care of me; and your father has asked Borden to go. Oh, it will be jolly—grand!"

The Color ceased talking to kiss Gene, whom she considered the embodiment of all that was worthy and good.

"There's lots of fish in the lakes, and a

floating island—think of that. It has trees on it, and blows over the water. Jim says that a snowslide carried a lot of timber down, and these finally got covered with earth, and then tiny things began to grow, and that's the way it was made. There's lots of fire-pink and wind-flowers, and there's wolves and wild things everywhere. The last time I was there some elk came down and splashed about in the edge of the lake, and there were funny kinds of tracks in the sand."

Gene drew the girl to her and kissed her forehead.

"It must be a very lovely place, dear. Really, I think you would persuade one to visit the moon, cold as it is, if that were possible. I want to see the lakes by night, and to row over them under the stars."

"We will! There's a boat there, and so many tiny nooks where one can run in. Oh, I'll show you lots of things we don't find in the books."

So it fell out that, as it pleased their haste or leisure, the different groups departed to the Lake of Moons. Superintendent Truxton entered into the affair with the fervency of one who has turned back to first things as the best of all—as they are. Memories of grass-grown trails, and fires long since washed out by the

rain, kindled him with enthusiasm. Out of the camp-fire would come forms known in the old days; and there would be the sound of voices in the pines, and the echo of steps in the wind—steps which had faltered from the trail.

Gene saw to it that her tent was pitched aside from the main company, for she loved quiet. She had brought with her some favorite authors and wished to have time for them. Had not Childe Harold loved the lakes?

Borden and Kelly made a booth in a trim angle of the wood, where the hemlocks stood tall and whispery on every side. Farther up the lake, and close to those who require the zest of fervent associations in order to be happy, Jack Harrington built his bowery court, unpacked his instruments, and prepared for the carnival. He had been at great trouble in getting his belongings over the trails, and it had been accomplished by dint of perseverance, and the relashing of many ropes, and the straightening of turning packs. Yet, in all his misfortunes, the globe-trotter had not lost his temper, nor permitted the packers to indulge their usual profanity.

By the time the peaks were tipped with the last pencils of day to carnation, the different camps were arranged, and out of the twilight came the twinkle of leaping fires and the far-off sound of voices.

XII

THE GROWTH OF A DREAM

BORDEN had regretted that the surge of the crowd had prevented him from getting a near look into Gene Truxton's eyes the day of the contest. He wished to know what might have been written there for his reading.

It had seemed that she flashed him strength and encouragement. He had felt it, and it had helped him win. He could not be mistaken in this. It had thrilled to the core of him. It would have been reward enough, if he could have felt her hand in his for an instant.

From day to day the power of her personality deepened upon him. Her eyes, dream-gloomed, haunted him constantly with their fathomless kindness and wonder. He recalled clearly the sensitiveness which played at the curves of her lips—lips the god of love had formed at birth and dedicated to his own chaste moods. His soul was becoming mixed with hers. Slowly, certainly, this was a fact—the greatest fact of his life—he wanted her passionately, wildly. With this consciousness came a wish to

serve—to please her. If only he might stand between her and danger, might shield her from harm, that would be proof. Wounds received in such a way would be as the healing of a broken bone.

Gradually a mellow mood came upon him. Once when Jim was gone he sat down and made two lists which represented his life. Candidly he made note of every fault, and severely he subjected himself to his own moral overhauling. To the last tittle he wrote all his delinquencies, bringing them out in their dark lines against the snowy character of Gene Truxton. In opposition to this he made note of what he found to commend in himself. His candor had made a vast difference in the two lists; one was quite long, the other very short. He had taken himself to his own threshing-floor for sifting. Beginning at the smallest faults, he renounced them all with a decided click of his jaw.

The nights slipped past, but Borden did not appear at the Bald Eagle. Old Lucky wondered, and wished for his regular drinks. The barkeep made inquiries, and the girls in the dance-halls asked questions. Jim coaxed his partner in vain to go to the place. Miners asked for the volcanic man who led them like a blizzard through melee and free-for-all. But gradually the change was accepted and the reason asked no

more; so the shuffle of feet wore out the night with Borden absent. Coming home, Jim would find his partner absorbed in books covering various subjects which go with good breeding and general knowledge. Next Borden refused to deal the deck over the rough table with his partner, and Jim burst into true Hibernian choler at this, to him, fanatical prohibition. But Borden went on quietly, disregarding the epithets heaped upon him by the half-admiring Kelly.

From somewhere—Jim never could trace it out—Borden secured a copy of the Bible, and began a desperate struggle with the profound things in that book. Jim watched this in utter astonishment. At first his mood was that of banter, his wit ringing through all the dictionary of happy applications of sarcasm, with an endless sprinkling of references to monks and holy orders. By turns Borden was called parson, prelate or doctor, as the whim might be with the Irishman.

But Borden met all this with a good-natured smile. One thing greatly surprised him—it had been easy to do this. With a movement of his will he had changed. It was easy; why did not all men assert themselves? Thus the time passed. When Jim talked of the wild times down Bald Eagle way, Borden remained quiet.

When he sat in the corner of the cabin and sang the old songs over, Borden would lay aside the meshes of Leviticus, or the divine flights of John, to listen, while the fire smouldered out on the hearth and the spruce back-logs became heaps of gray.

For the first time, Jim brought liquor to the cabin, making much ado about the quality, and insisting that Borden share the luxury. But the portion urged upon his companion went sputtering over the embers. After this Jim sat staring into the fire, till the calling of the ground-owls told him that it was time to get into his bunk.

Kelly had another cause for complaint: Borden had quit the use of tobacco, and the companionable Irishman felt the loneliness of solitary indulgence keenly. But that which topped the structure of his partner's unreasonableness with a gargoyle of unendurable ugliness was the quietly expressed determination to attend church occasionally, uttered in Borden's most decisive way. Jim exploded at this.

"By the Nine Gods of the Romans, Borden! what do you mean? Haven't I heard you say eleven hundred times that you despised that mut; and here you are, headed for the sanctuary. Confound it, man, wake up!"

"Through, Jim?" Borden looked his part-

ner over as he might a stranger, at the same time placing a pan of water on the coals to heat.

"Through! I haven't begun on you yet. Kill my luck! but I'd rather hear old Sluicy sing 'The Jolly Rovers' with a bad cold, and helm hard to larboard, than listen to that gilly speak his piece."

"A man might hear worse things than what that fellow has to say," Borden answered doggedly. "Anyway, he don't tell a man to go and get drunk, and that beats the other thing. Think I'll loaf down there when the notion strikes me; so, we'll call that settled."

Nevertheless, Borden got little satisfaction from the knowledge that the missionary and Jack Harrington were among the company departing for the lakes; the one profuse in shallow mannerisms, and the other out to play the cavalier on a floor washed clean with stars. Such things belonged in courts, where charts for morals were not required.

This bubble from the Seven Seas was handsome; Borden knew that. He knew, also, that he had ways which were exceeding pleasing to women. That was a devilish charm which haunted his dark face, and Borden wished that this member of the party had seen fit to stay at the camp.

"I'll see her every day," he thought, when he accepted the invitation to go with the campers. "They shall not monopolize her. I have much to tell her, and it may be she will want to listen. She ought to know what he is, and I'll tell her if he comes bothering around; and he will, for that's Jack Harrington. He could no more keep away from such a girl than he could jump across the lake. But if he comes any of his fine tricks, I'll chuck him down the bank." Borden's mood was berserker.

He sat down to adjust Gene Truxton and Jack Harrington for the next week. The outlook was not to his liking. But he would go and take a seat at the game. He had always preferred a big stake, and this promised to be the limit. Yet, for once he did not relish the element of chance which attended the try-out, for in the elusive eyes of Gene Truxton he had read only riddles—riddles he could not understand.

XIII

WHAT THE PINES HEARD

THE vale of moons was ideal.

From the far white cliffs to the lakes cupped in gray stone there brooded romance and dreams. High in soft, blue haze hung the pines; and smeared in the glades and hollows, aspens and grass. Through this realm walked Beauty, shod with sandals of gold.

Gene watched the sun drop westward behind the range. Then the lengthening shadows splashed out from the great uplifts like seas of ink. With quickened breath, she saw the marvelous purples gather above the banked murk on the mountains and the glow become less on the cliffs. But before the deeper night had fallen the moon mounted gloriously from the east. As the calling of the night-birds grew tender in the distance and the camp-fire died away, Gene slipped into the clasping dusk and was lost.

Following a narrow path, cut with the sharp feet of deer, she came to a small opening, which skirted both the lake and the tents. She found

a seat on a fallen tree and sat down to indulge a thoughtful mood. From a glade stole the rustlings of aspens and the smell of bear cherry. Somewhere a tiny stream complained to its boulders. Beyond, interminably, rose the heave of ridge and peak. The night was written with the scripture of stars, and through it seeped the pallid spume of marshes. Far away, a wolf howled dismally. From a rim of broken cliffs an answer floated into the shadowy mesh and was lost.

There Borden found her, sitting like the embodiment of beauty and romance. With an unrestrained motion he threw his hat on the ground, and sat down beside her. There was something strikingly insular about him which commanded her. He reminded her of a sword half drawn from its scabbard. She wondered a little when she remembered that she expected him to come. In fact, it seemed she had reached this spot by appointment. The clasping passion of the moonlight shut them in. They were subdued and thoughtful.

Gene raised her eyes to the white ridges and cliffs, shattered as by cosmic sledging.

"It's a great, clean land," she began, her face tender in the idealizing light.

He turned toward her with an impulsive gesture.

"Where everything should be clean." There was suggestion in his voice.

"There is witch-mist on the water, and the moon children are at play in the glades," she evaded.

"We talked of such things once before—do you remember?"

"Yes; you said—"

"That it was my God. And it was then; the only one I had."

She looked at him intently. The night had laid its benedictions on his head. He looked the master he was, elemental and fire-wrought to the core. She knew this hour had been set flying toward them from eternity. On its mission of fateful issues it had come, unwearied and unhindered. The moon had agreed to rise upon it, and the lake to sigh its shore-long welcome. Now it must be given chance to bear all with which it travailed. In another such hour she had fought it all to a definite conclusion. It had been hard, very hard, and her heart beat hot and wild; but the tears which came at last were the evidence of mastery.

If Borden had been asked, he doubtless would have thought himself quite able to analyze his own feelings, though he was blind to the fact that the source of his aspirations for better things did not rise above the girl beside

him; and that the Divine was given no higher place in his thought than before. God had always been a vague, impersonal idea; conveying the notion of vastness rather than the conception of a being infinitely tender and wise, and who could hate evil as utterly as he loved good. Such a conception as he had easily took shape under the soul form of the one who appealed to him as the highest embodiment of all that was good. Like a will-o'-the-wisp he had floated from swamp to swamp, resting at last, to his own satisfaction, at the feet of a god he could see and love.

Gene, who was acting from a higher and clearer vision, knew the fatal consequences of his attitude. Sometime this castle of mist must fall crashing about his ears. It should not remain to work its deceptions by her consent. Hers was a great unselfishness. She wished most for his good. In this, her own feelings must sink to a subordinate place. The light in him was darkness, and he persisted in gathering his darkness from her. Still, the working out of this necessary revelation was one of pain to her; the nails of her cross mangled cruelly; the thorns which must touch her temples would be as the stinging of asps. There was risk, too; for had she not been the lone star in his night, which had brought him even to the nebulous

conceptions which he had? To quench this might plunge him into utter blackness. Yet, he must know his mistake, at any cost.

Slowly the words formed in her mind: "He saved others, himself he can not save." Gene understood the truth of those words as never before. The cross still stood on the high ground of the heart, and that foundation forever took the form of a skull. The hour of her testing had come! She pressed her hand to her heart to still its wild beating. Beside her, strong and masterful, sat the man who, though he dreamed not of it, had kindled strange things in her soul. The mighty love within her would have exalted her to be lost in him, had she been less strong. It was her birthright, her supreme glory. In this way God had launched these strange ships from his creative hand. She turned away and prayed for mastery, knowing that with all the dominant force of his tempest nature he would try to prevent the answer.

"Have you found another?" she asked, recalling herself.

"I have—that is—I—have found—something—I'm changed."

She nodded her understanding, and waited.

"I had not thought of such things till—you—came. It was that night the Queen was shot.

After that I knew there was something more than the trees and hills." He turned toward her wistfully, but met no warmth.

Gene had anticipated his climax, and was ready. Outwardly she was calm, but her breast heaved with smothering emotion, and her blood bounded riotously.

"We may contribute to one another's advancement, as the streams nourish the laurel and the cherry, but at the end the tree must stand up against the storm alone."

"What storm?"

The question caused her heart to grow heavy. He was blind, and the anointing which must open his eyes was to be the red blood of her own heart.

"You will find there are tempests. Evil and Good are enemies to the end of the world. If I have helped you, I am glad. The sowing and the reaping go on forever. I, too, have been helped by others."

Borden stirred uneasily. There was little fellowship in her reply.

"But the tree can not live without the water," he argued. "Take that away and it will die."

"The greater trees grow by the general rain."

"But I am not general in anything; I am

intensely specific. What I think I say, what I want I take, what I don't want I let alone. Some things I need, others I don't need—there you have it.”

“But there comes a time when the life, like the sunshine, must pour itself out to all.”

“But that don't stop a habit or break a bottle,” he persisted.

“On the other hand, that is the only way,” she answered quietly.

“I've done some of that lately,” he communicated with pride.

“I am glad.” Gene spoke the truth.

“It was not so hard. There is everything in will power, you understand.”

“I would say there is everything in divine power.”

Borden shrugged his shoulders, searching her face closely.

“Perhaps; I don't know.”

“That is the lesson we must all learn.”

“But I thought the aspen was to grow alone.”

“Not utterly. There are the soil and the air and the sun. Yet, it builds its own fiber and faces its own storms. So must we do the right for its own sake. And, no matter what may be our portion, we must go on, devoted to the one idea: this is duty and I will do it, if for-

saken by all. Can you measure up to that?"

"I can do what I make up my mind to. I've quit going to the Bald Eagle, quit tobacco, quit swearing—except when I don't think—and cards thrown in. And I've been reading the Bible; what do you think of that? Can't report much headway, though, for it's a tangle of the queerest things I ever saw. But it makes a fellow feel that he has been mean, to read it."

"Do you feel differently toward the missionary? You know, love is the master thing."

He laughed in the old way. "I thought I was doing pretty well to tolerate him. You saw me at church last Sunday."

"And there was good in the message?"

"Yes, a little."

"Even that is a matter of understanding. The loss of selfishness covers it all."

He looked at her mystified. What was this he was hearing? All his life he had been in a struggle to maintain himself, and now he was told to put others first.

"I do not understand it. Everywhere, on the trail and in the tunnel, it has been a fight to hold one's own. I've battled, fang and claw, like a wolf for a bone. I've battered down claim-jumpers at prospect holes with a shovel, and I've tumbled cheaters headlong from games. That has been the order of things. What was

mine I took, or spoiled it for the other fellow. That has worked; it will still work."

"That is the law of self. It was the government of the cave and the forest path our first parents trod. But there is a higher law—the law of mercy. If one takes the coat, this law says, 'Give the cloak.' If we are asked to go a mile, we are to go two. When it is best, we must stand ready to give up what we hold dearest. Could you do that?"

Instantly Borden made a personal application of this standard in the case of Gene Truxton. He had a quick vision of her eyes, alight with love, turned on some face, and her hand resting in another hand. The thought was maddening. Though she might never be his, he could not bring himself to agree to the loss. He devoured her loved form with a glance—a glance that seemed to cut the moonlight. Where she moved through the belt of his vision there was light, but darkness, deep and dense, was banked beyond that.

"I could no more do that than I could lift this mountain!" he admitted, honestly.

"But you have started well. You have given up much. But there is one other thing you must learn how to give—"

"What?" he interrupted.

"Yourself!"

“And see others take what belongs to me, and what I want?”

“Not necessarily. But should the test come you would suffer loss rather than do wrong. Anyway, we must be different from those who are actuated by selfish motives alone. God is unselfish. He sends the clouds to pour out their fullness on the land, but they retain not one drop for themselves. The soil yields up its harvests, and the sea its fish, but they keep nothing back selfishly. The sun makes his many visits throughout the year, but though he pours out his wine on the world with prodigal abandon, not one drop does he retain for himself. So do the rivers run for all mills, and the forests grow for all who need shade. The springs bubble like poetry from the earth for every thirst, and into this exalted sphere we must rise, if we are to know those emotions worthy of the soul.”

He shook his head. “That is good, I can see that—see it as I do those peaks there, but I’ll have to work out the way to reach it.”

He had permitted her to enter the throne-room of his soul, where only the Divine should ever come, and she sought for a way to lead him up where the morning was breaking on the hilltops of spirit exaltation. A sore wounding was prepared for them both. This was not

easy. What would the end be? Policy counseled a course of compromise, but Truth signaled from the old, old way of thorns. With a sigh she put the thought from her. Did the path lead to peace? She could not tell. There was no other way. This man, who had set the wonder workers dancing in her heart, and who had thrilled her with moods which baffled her with their exquisite pain, had mistaken the love of woman for the love of God, and to refuse to shock him from his error would be to help deceive him.

He was waiting for her to speak, when she turned toward him. As she studied his strong face, outlined against a mass of moonwashed laurel, something like pity welled in her heart. Fit as he was, he needed her, and, woman-like, she longed to go to his aid. But, no; it could not be. Gene felt the need of wisdom, and her lips moved in silent prayer. Out of the dusky immensity came the croon of strange mourners; everywhere there is something that grieves. Her reply came in a low, clear voice.

"The rule must apply to the entire life—more, the thing that lives. This is the law. Nature has her harmonies and her repulsions. There is a send in the sea which wages war with the shore. Set over against all the balms and wines are the nettles and poisons. Serpents

coil in flowers; maladies set pirate sail on the air. Everywhere I see that harmony and peace are secured by classification. Life flows in channels. The great unity of the world is secured by separation. In the sea there are schools; on the land, families. There is another law; look at it. Everything has its part in the general upkeep of things. The wild rose is the mould of past years glorified into leaf and tint. The grass feeds the deer, the deer is food for us. Our nets sweep the sea, and we gather of the store. Kingdom takes from kingdom. The one above is nourished by the one below. The mineral reaches up to the vegetable; the vegetable up to the animal; the animal up to the spiritual.

“The law of nature and the heart is that of vicarious suffering. Something always is in pain for something else. Love could operate by no other law. The mother weeps for her lost child. Love demands a gift—the gift of that which loves. It is the pine which casts its anchor in a rock which is able to stand up against the gale, and make the very winds that smite it carry its cones to far soils. Do you understand me? We find God only when we lose ourselves. Faith is costly; virtue is high-priced. Victory is the best we can do.”

Gene searched his face to see if he had

understood, and saw that his hunger for her had kept his eyes more or less holden. She had done what she could, and she rose to return to her tent. She had spoken beyond her own planning, words—swift words and deep—which he could not grasp.

Borden rose also, and came to her side.

"You have spoken profound things to-night, Miss Truxton; things it will take long days of schooling to understand—if I ever do. All this did not come to you in an hour. I grasp it as I might yon star. I lack the wings to rise to it."

"I must return to the tent; father and Aunt Ruth will think something has carried me off," she laughed, shaking off the mood which had been upon her.

As she spoke she turned from him. Borden was disappointed. She had said little of his achievements in reform. Rather, she had seemed to hold them as very light. He had expected to see her eyes fly banners of joy at the change in him. He turned from her and looked down on the lake. He felt, somehow, a vague loss which it was not easy to bear. In that moment Gene did not dare look at him. She knew he was there, strong, silent; his splendid brow knit with perplexity. She had tried to plant olives in his Gethsemane, but these would make the bloody sweat none the less real.

The crystal night took them in a shining net, and under that another, shadowy but strong; and they were meshed together and swung far out over dark ravines and haunted moorlands. From across the lake came the howl of the wolf, repeated in the long complaint. A stag whistled from the hill above them. In every glade there seemed to be a shrine, and the wonder-workers of moon and mist wrought their lordliest. In the leaping, hot heart of Gene Truxton there was another shrine, with its little knee-bench swept of all but the myrtle of pure desire, waiting for that wondrous knee which in the plan of God should bend thereon.

"Will you go with me?" she asked, wishing to break the spell of silence.

"Yes," he replied, turning toward her.

As they left the glade, the sound of laughter, chesty and unrestrained, echoed up the lakeshore. Borden stopped abruptly. There was no mistaking it.

"I think you are to have company. You will not need me. The path is quite plain, and the tent is just there." For the briefest moment he stood looking at her as if to solve some riddle in his mind; then, stepping upon a fallen log, he sprang lightly over a growth of laurel and disappeared.

XIV

WHERE THE WILL-O'-THE-WISP LEADS

THE great dipper had turned over in the sky before Jack Harrington and his friends left the Truxton camp. He had come for a purpose, and he had achieved it. Gene Truxton was to accompany him over the lake the following morning, in the first taking out of the boat.

He had expected nothing else but that he would secure her promise; women had never refused him. The god of love had made him for trysts, and woman was the angel of his heaven. He congratulated himself for a truly irresistible fellow, and proudly classed his amours with those of Antony, and all the other burning lights of love. Dame Nature had asked for one who might truly interpret the nature feminine, and he, Jack Harrington, had been the answer. Gene Truxton was delighted at the compliment he had paid her. After her, there were others. God! that would make the outing worth while.

Down the tumbled hills spilled the stream-

ing sunshine. The glooms lifted from the canyon, and the wild things sought the thickets. The lake shone as if ready to burst into flame, and the forests seemed smothered in an ocean of warm gold.

Borden went thoughtfully down to the edge of the water and threw himself on the pine grass under some young firs. There he lay watching the shadows go out of the hollows—watched till he saw Jack Harrington and Gene Truxton enter the boat and push out into the lake. A grim smile came to his lips; he had expected it; he knew Jack Harrington.

As he watched them, a great rebellion was born within him. In that instant a door closed somewhere in his heart, and all behind it became utterly black. How gracefully the fellow could row. This was what Borden expected. After all, Gene Truxton had seen things to admire in him. He was handsome in his way, but of that variety which indicates self-conceit rather than moral strength. Borden's hands would fit on his throat. He longed to place them there; to strangle the wit. As he grew angry the desire for tobacco returned, and his hand went mechanically to his pocket—and found it empty. Cheek by jowl with this came the old love of a fight, dominant and irresistible.

Was it an accident that the boat turned

down the shore toward his camp? No, by the fates! That was Jack Harrington's way of emphasizing his victory. Borden's brow clouded. Gene Truxton had not objected, evidently, and that meant that she, too, was willing that he might be wounded by this chip from the Seven Seas. He would take little of this from any man, and the young gallant best have a care. Borden rose and walked away. He would not remain where his rival could see him. Swinging up the trail, he reached camp in time to catch Harrington's distant signal, as he whirled around a point of timber into the black-blue water beyond.

Jim was singing lustily, his fine Irish voice rolling down the aisles of the forest. This morning he was rehearsing a bit of sad history from his own land, kept alive in the pleasing couplets of "The Rising of the Moon":

"Murmurs passed along the valley
Like the banshee's mournful croon,
And a thousand blades were flashing
At the rising of the moon."

Jim, in his happy way, guarded sacredly the traditions and prophecies of his people. Borden was bored by the song. He wished his partner would keep still. A storm was gathering in his soul. The bite of disappointment was keen; longing ate with a cruel tooth. He stood for

some moments watching the distant boat, his eyes mere slits, and his jaw set hard. The craft was scarcely moving now. The forest wall beyond made for it a shadowy privacy well suited to the occasion. The occupants seemed determined to enjoy the hour to the full. Slowly the boat drifted into the moist gloom of the tall woods and was lost from sight. As it disappeared, the vision which had begun to dawn in Borden's soul was darkened. For some time he stood calmly looking at the place where the boat passed from sight. Easily he could imagine what Harrington was saying, and the answering dream-meshes in the eyes of his companion. He pictured to himself her bright hair falling around her face in that winsome way it had. Just now she was leaning like a warm nymph over the boat's edge, her fingers trailing in the water. The thought was fire. There at the other end of the boat sat Harrington, his eyes upon the face at which he was unworthy to look. The thing was a saber-thrust. What right had such a man to look upon Gene Truxton? Ah, but she wished him to look upon her! An oath rose to Borden's lips.

"Got ahead of you, did he, Bord?" Jim asked, banteringly. "Ought to fix things up in time, along that line. I'll bet a sluice-box that

you never mentioned it to her. Just hung around and let that scamp walk right in and make the date under your very nose. You deserve what Pat gave the drum, and I'm the man who can do it. Get me?"

Borden made no reply, and to all appearances seemed not to have heard. He was as one who plans for himself a fair palace. He gathers his white stone, and shapes his foundation. Day by day he watches the clean walls grow, and fancy pictures the clinging of vines and the singing of birds around it. Then a sudden shock topples the fluted columns to the earth, and all is a shapeless ruin. Gene Truxton he had set on high in his soul. He had interpreted God by her. She was all that was good and beautiful. He never could think otherwise. But she was human. The touch of clay was on her garments; else why was she on the lake with Jack Harrington? Perhaps there was no God. Perhaps existence was a vast mistake, a jumble of cross-purposes.

Meantime, Jim sang on merrily. He was busy arranging fishing tackle for a trip with The Color and Queen to a stream where the finny darters were abundant. Nothing was more to his liking, and he whistled and sang from very pleasure.

For Borden the day promised only a stretch

of gloomy thoughts and hunger of heart which would not be good to bear. He had entered his first great test, and he felt it lift him—bear him onward toward uncharted things. To the scrap-heap with his resolutions! What was left when the inspiration which had moved him to something better had become an agency to turn him back to savagery? For a time he strolled about camp, agitated and cast down, his brain swarming with evil thoughts. Then he plunged into the forest, and did not return till evening.

As he drew near camp the sound of the Irishman's voice, pitched high, reached him. Things were going well with Kelly. Borden felt something of resentment at his partner's unconcern. He found him taking fried trout out of a skillet, and adding them to a pile which indicated abnormal appetites. Borden ate in silence.

The moon rose early, for it was at the full. Almost with the fading of the tints from the peaks it came. Borden left camp with a deliberate step. He had wrought out his course in the hard thinking of the day, and he followed the tiny deer-path at a swift pace. Here and there he caught glimpses of the camp-fire toward which he was going. It would be very pleasant on the water at such an hour. Gene Truxton might have found things which

interested her in Jack Harrington, but she was not weak; she had not promised him an evening on the lake; at least, not this evening.

He found her walking over the white pebbles heaped along the shore, where the water broke with a laughter low and sweet. She turned toward him with the old smile. Borden felt half his resentment go out of him.

"Were you expecting me?" he asked, eagerly.

"I am not surprised that you came," she answered. "Isn't it beautiful! I feel as if I were walking the shore of some spirit lake in Paradise." She raised her eyes to the vast star spaces above and stood looking at the burning points in silence.

All about them there was peace—peace and a strange quiet, broken only by the gurgle of water among the stones. Beyond, ever endlessly beyond, reached the passionate wilderness, its heart banked with smothered fire, and a call, a wild, passionate asking, beating through all the aisles of it. Yet, crystal clean though it was, Gene knew that somewhere, even here, wound the dim river of tears.

"Are you tired of boating?" he asked, trying to keep out of his voice all tones of the reproach which he had felt.

"There is no time like this to be on the

water. See how the moon-sisters dance everywhere."

He helped her into the boat and pushed out from shore. Borden turned the boat in another direction from the one it had taken in the morning. His strokes were feverish and strong. The oars doubled as if to the breaking, and the boat flew like a swan over the water.

Once more the test was upon her, and Gene Truxton knew that she would need to be strong. She saw that she had succeeded in deceiving him; that he misunderstood her. It had to be, and she must continue in the same course. Against her own rolled the power of his nature, dominant, masterful. Again she must turn him away, when by every law of her heart she wished to call him to her, that she might find rest in the vastness of his starving love. Borden watched her as he rowed. Her face was spirit-pure. Never did the moon fall upon such hair. The elusive, haunting beauty of her held him silent. He knew her soul was togaed in pure white. With this girl before him, there was no moon, no stars, no ascending mountains, no God. All he felt or knew was centered in her. With the thought came a cloud—a cloud which that morning had risen as a man's hand—something might separate them; he might be forced from her presence.

He almost rose from his seat, while the oars dripped in mid-air. It was as if the eyes of Jack Harrington were looking tantalizingly into his. With a smothered oath, he returned the stare. Then the mood passed and the picture faded from his mind. Borden recalled himself. He would be acting the fool if he did not have a care.

Gene was kind, yet she hid herself in a reserve which kept him at a distance. She knew she could trust this man utterly, and she wished to make him feel that confidence, yet to guide him into the path where he might find his true self unfettered of all deception. As they drifted through the odorous mist she felt no fear of him, no dread; only trust and the mastery of his love for her, which was asking tumultuously for hers, and to which her burning heart panted to respond with the answer, which would be herself. But higher interests called upon her for a generous self-denial. Silently she prayed with aching temples. Once more she prepared herself for sacrifice.

"I'll take you where we can see the seven moons, if you wish," he suggested, turning toward a rocky slope which rose abruptly from the edge of the lake.

"Please do. I have thought there was some poetical reason for the name."

A moment later the boat touched the shore, and Borden stepped out, helping Gene to land. Together they climbed the craggy hillside. At the top he led her to a flat fragment of granite. When she was seated, he came close to her and leaned over the rock. Below them spread the glittering lake, forest-fenced, and cut with tiny bays. Beyond flickered the half-dozen campfires of the tenters.

"At a certain hour of the night, seven moons can be seen from this point. It is just about time now. It is caused by the forest and necks of land dividing the lake into almost seven lakes. You can see them now." Borden pointed out the number of moons floating in the translucent water. In silence they looked upon the elfin multiplication; watched till six of the luminous faces dimmed away under the deepening shadows cast by forest and hill.

It all seemed natural enough to Borden that he should be here with this woman, under the stars. The spell of her eyes, clear, yet shadowy as the lake below them, invited to confidence. He was thinking. Many questions rushed to his lips, some of them hot and desperate. Over and over again, he determined to say all that seethed within him, but as often it dissolved to nothing before the reserve which constantly disconcerted him. The restraint touched the darker chords

of his soul, and he kindled with rebellion. Only that very morning, Jack Harrington had taken this woman over that same lake, in the boat he could see bobbing at tether a hundred feet below. All moods demand utterance, and Borden wished to remonstrate with her, to speak frankly. True to his nature, he began abruptly:

"Did you enjoy your ride with Jack Harrington this morning?" He turned toward her as he spoke and their eyes met.

"I always enjoy boating. Mr. Harrington is an excellent hand with the oars. It was delightful at that early hour."

Instantly he resolved to give her a correct outline of the character of the globe-trotter. He would set him before her as he was, and see what she would do.

"But did you enjoy the Harrington features of it? How did that rascal impress you, anyway?" Borden was finding it hard to keep from getting angry.

"You call him a rascal. Really, I did not find him that. He treated me as a perfect gentleman, and he did not get angry. He was very nice."

"Nice!" Borden uttered the word through closed teeth. "Let me tell you about him, and then we'll see." He waited for her to object, but she did not.

"That fellow is a scamp, a rascal . . . just that. He is a trifler from the start. I think you should let him alone."

"What does he do that makes you speak of him in that way?" Gene's voice was low and colorless.

"Do! He's up to everything. He's a general hard one, and knows about as much of honor as a thief knows of honesty."

"These things are bad enough, I grant, but you have mentioned only those which are habitual to nearly all the men in these camps. You have told me that you do them yourself. If you think me improper for boating with Mr. Harrington by day, then what shall be said of crossing the lake with you under the moon?"

Borden winced. Selfishness always sees itself the last object of criticism.

"You say I think you improper. Not that. Rather, I look upon you as being the soul of propriety. But I thought you did not know . . . did not understand, and I wanted you to—that's all. You should keep him where he belongs."

"And where is that?"

"That? Why, on the other side of the lake—or in it. I have told you the facts."

"Do you wish me to apply the same rule to you, and for the same reason? Suppose Mr.

Harrington should see fit to tell me what he knows—or may know—of you; would you wish me to follow his suggestions if he advised me as you have? Sin is a black, horrible thing, and it can not be painted into respectability by one's own estimate of himself."

"But I have abandoned those things," Borden protested.

"Have you put them out of your life for good? Suppose a great test should come: suppose trial and loss mingle in your cup; what then?"

He hesitated before answering.

"Yes, unless—that is—there might be circumstances where I would forget everything. I'm built on a wild plan. I think the day of my birth must have been one of storm. But I'm honest, and I'm not low."

"At our very best, God could find much fault with us. True humility does not invite inspection—rather, it seeks to exalt other and more worthy objects. Those are lofty standards which call upon us to forget our own and promote the good of another, even when we lose by it."

"Do you expect that of me?" he asked quietly.

"Not I, but there's One who does."

"That's too much for a whirlwind like me,"

he replied, a note of disappointment in his voice.

"You can reach it," she encouraged, leaning toward him, her glance eager. "You have strength and capacity. Where there is foundation for great sin, there is usually ability for as great righteousness." Her eyes were wistful, but she veiled them under long lashes.

He shook his head and answered in his blunt way:

"Impossible! When I saw you with that fellow this morning the old fight devil got hold of me. I watched him turn down the lake toward my camp, and I understood. I wanted to throw him into the lake—I want to now." The tone in his voice startled her.

"That is not worthy of you," she answered quietly.

"You tell me I must give up; that I must add cloak to coat and go an extra mile. I was not thinking of that when I concluded to clean up a bit. I thought you understood just what the proper thing was, and now I find you riding over the lake with that frosted leaf, blown here from the frontiers of the world; and, when I tell you what he is, you make a comparison between us. What I want to know is: Will you apply that rule to yourself and keep him out of camp?"

He had said it in his own way, and he stood

doggedly, waiting for her to speak. Gene's glance swept over his strong outlines; the set, resolute face, with its firm chin and the eyes which always looked straight at every object. His hair fell over his head, and Gene had a vague feeling that she would like to straighten it by running her fingers through it. Every curve of him was a challenge—an invitation to battle. Inwardly, she compared him to the god of force. She had expected him to turn her rule against her, and with a heart full of hunger—a hunger which ate with a sharpened tooth—she kept her place in the false light. He was losing confidence in her, and that was necessary before he could have confidence in the proper things. By her own wounds she hoped for his healing.

Of the unworthy motives which actuated him, Borden was utterly ignorant. In fact, he had considered himself exceedingly worthy in what he had done, and it had been a sore disappointment to him that Gene Truxton had not been more ardent in her congratulations. Evidently, she had set a very light value on what he had done for her sake. He was piqued, and his pride wounded. How could this woman, who had been boating with Jack Harrington, know the value of the best things? The mental question stabbed Borden like a dagger, for he

had made her his standard. At this point of his thinking there entered in a contradiction. This girl was gloriously pure and worthy. It flashed from her eyes and shone in her face. There was about her features the asking of white flowers. How, then, could she admit an impropriety? He knit his brows darkly.

Gene knew that before Borden could find the best things of life he must lose her . . . she must force him from her. But not for a moment must he understand what she was doing. He would misunderstand her; he misunderstood her now. The light in his eyes showed how keen his disappointment was. She did not answer his question immediately. She wished a clear issue between them, then the break would be without edges.

"Tell me what you intend to do," he insisted as she hesitated.

"Why do you ask me to treat Mr. Harrington so? He may be all you say of him, but he treated me as a gentleman, and I hardly see how I could be unkind without cause. Nothing but harm comes of ill treatment. Even when we have been wronged, we must be patient."

Her answer brought the climax she expected. A notion that good women are often attracted to rascals, and which is more or less the belief of every man, possessed Borden at

this moment. The cosmic jealousy which lies at the bottom of the male nature flamed in him. When he spoke, his words were as breaking steel.

"Then I'm done! It's all a lie—a cheap lie—what I had believed about this thing—and you!"

There was such a weight of implication in his words that Gene almost cried out from pain. She knew he must doubt her, for her course led to that, but the necessity did not lessen the sting. When she answered him it was in words full of kind, but quiet, dignity.

"Worthless indeed is that structure of faith founded upon so cheap a confidence. I hardly think you have a right to question my motives in treating Mr. Harrington as he treated me—properly. We did not quarrel, it gives me pleasure to say. Please row me back to the landing." Almost in silence they went down the slope, entered the boat, and the next minute they were whirling over the dancing water, swift as a shadow.

From far away came the wail of a cougar, the sound resembling the human voice under great stress. Out of a shallow a number of elk splashed, crashing the flags, and startling a floating cloud of wild fowl. At the landing he helped her out of the boat with a firm,



“Please row me back to the landing”

though gentle, hand. Turning into the trail, he left her with a brief "Good-night."

Borden was angry. He strode along with a reckless abandon which indicated his mood; nor did the notes of Kelly's song which reached him cool his heat. The Irishman was always singing . . . what was there to sing about? Refusing to talk, Borden went to bed. The following morning he was up early. Throughout the day he said little, and spent the time thinking his own thoughts.

If there is cosmic bitterness and cosmic joy, there is also elemental kindness to be found in noble natures. Borden was kind. After a time the first glow of his anger died out and he cursed himself for a fool. He wished to redeem himself from the rudeness of the night before; for he felt that Gene Truxton had good reason to consider him a cad and a bonehead.

Stretched at full length under the tall pines, he lay listening to the sound in their tops. He wished for night, that he might put himself in a better light. No, he would not wait so long. Striding off to the other camp, he learned that the three women had gone with Kelly and Harrington to a trout stream for the day. He returned in a bitter mood. He was piqued, disappointed. Perhaps he had not been too severe, after all. Then came a feeling that he

had humiliated himself. Nevertheless, when the sun had set he went back up the trail on the old quest.

The twilight lay purple and tender over the vast wilderness. The last bleeding of the west turned the tall cliffs to fainter carnation. They were like the brows of terribly old men turned to far objects and dreams.

Borden paused to watch the colors change on the hills. He seemed the heart-beat of the vast wilderness. A crane rose from the marge of the lake and flapped lazily to the farther shore. The actions of the bird seemed almost a protest . . . an objection. The forest deepened to an indefinite blur. Something remote, something unattainable, brooded wide and haunting everywhere. The spell touched him like a tale of grief, and he wished for tears to ease the inner pain which he felt. A flight of mallards rose from an eddy and streamed away, leaving queer lines on the ghostly water. Then the moon came up, a clear-faced glory above the hills, spilling the valley full of amber wine. The songs of the night singers began in the remote places, and from far up the mountain came the shrill challenge of a stag.

Borden felt strangely oppressed. He seemed in the power of something that grieved. It was the ache primordial; the something which

makes nature an irresistible power. Down the aspen aisles, through the larch vistas, at the skyline, wandered this elfin personality, watching with witch-eyes all who pursued it. Out of the hemlock gloom there seemed the waving of a white hand. Over the spanned waters it danced, writing of love upon the tablets of the moon—love and pain. Picture her as you will, love her as you may, never will this burning siren quite lay her passionate head on your breast. Sometimes her cheek will seem to touch yours; sometimes she will hold her lips so close that you will feel their burning curves upon yours. But never is the caress quite true; never is the kiss fully given.

Borden left the trail and made his way through the laurel toward the place where he had talked to Gene Truxton. As he neared the spot, a low, throbbing sound came to him and he paused abruptly to listen. Only one man in the hills could touch a string like that. Borden's face gathered darkness. Creeping forward, lest his step disturb them, he saw Jack Harrington seated where he had been, and Gene Truxton in her old place. The derelict was at his best, and he swept the instrument with a caressing hand, while his voice rose with the beating of the chords. In every note there was persuasive pleading.

The girl sat with face slightly averted. In the flooding light she seemed like something sphere-born; an impersonation of beauty and charm. Once she looked toward where Borden stood, and he fancied that she knew he was there; that her glance penetrated the snowy cloud of cherry flowers which screened him. The song finished, he heard her speak words of appreciation. The old anger surged up in Borden's soul, relentless, masterful.

"Curse him! I believe she is infatuated with him, after all," he hissed through closed teeth.

A determination to strangle the man caused Borden to take a step forward. Then he recalled himself. No, he would not do it. It would not change matters. Sometime he might, but not then. If she found pleasure in the company of this man, that was the end of it. Good resolutions to the winds! There was nothing in any of it. Bah! he had been a fool and a weakling; now he would be a man. Noiselessly he retraced his steps, the guitar notes dying out of the air. At the edge of the glade he stood still, raised his right hand high, as if renouncing something, and then went on, not knowing that a sad eye had seen him leave the path by the shore and enter the glade, and that tears blinded it afterwards.

XV

THE SEAT OF THE SCORNFUL

THERE was scarlet sin in the saloons and dance-halls of Deadman. Every night was purple with wantonness, and every day black with wickedness. Down the passes came the swarming thousands, and the siren hand reached out and drew them in.

Old Lucky kept his place near the bar, waiting for a benevolent treater. Sluicy tipped and tilted through the maudlin pack, loud of song and wide of sweep. Burke, like a ghoulish lion, roared his challenges over the scattering crowd. Brookie put his dog through his latest trick and laughed accompaniment. But one zest had been lacking at the Bald Eagle for weeks—Borden. He was not there. Among his old friends there seemed to be something wrong. Lucky missed him in the line-up, which usually left him out. Sluicy found it hard to borrow enough to put the kick in his clogged veins.

But the tension was relieved suddenly one night when Borden crashed through the swinging shutters, and with astonishing ease threw

the lanky form of Old Lucky over the bar. A wild cheer welcomed the return of the Bohemian to his own Bohemia.

"The hogwash is on me, boys. Line up!" he shouted, sending a piece of gold over the counter. The next moment the crash of glasses announced that internal deserts had been washed with that rain which makes for greater thirst.

Borden found himself the center of an appreciative group, mellow with liquor, and big with the animal. Like an ox, Burke heaved a path for himself through the crowd, and approached Borden with face berry-red.

"Well, back again, sonny. I knew you'd come. Takes more'n a woman's face to tie up a man. I was looking for you. Ha! ha!"

The old, hard smile was on Borden's lips.

"I whipped you once, Burke, and I'll do it again if you don't leave that out," he said, getting close.

"That's all right; that's all right! We ain't going to have any trouble, Borden. Didn't mean any harm, you understand. But glad you're back."

"You must leave out this woman business, then, or we may."

In the shock and crash of the saloon life, Borden liberated the spirit of bitterness which

surged within him. The soul of the jungle man was his now. Old dispensations of stone-age and mace came to life in his nature. A wild love of action was upon him. He welcomed the fray as thirst a spring. For a time the sun of inspiration had floated through his sky; half hid in mist, it is true, but it had been there; and its subduing influence had started strange growths in his heart. But this had gone down—gone crashing into a whirl of fog and storm. All the warmer currents which fancy had sent out came roaring back freighted with the wreckage of disappointment. Jealousy and hot suspicion joined hands in his brain, leading a wild rigadon through the halls of his reason.

No one had ever seen Borden so reckless before. Deep within him the horror-workers wrought green chaos in his blood. From fiber to fiber his insulted body rose in revolt. Bonfires were kindled roarily in his heart. He felt big sufficiencies upon him. From a man of the drift and the drill, he had suddenly become the king of Vagabondia; the glorious chieftain of all the clans of combat. A boiling desire to contend gripped him.

Furiously the fiends worked the change in him. In desperate haste they wiped out the landmarks of his soul. Moral balancings came

crumbling into heaps. Sober poises took to themselves unaccountable anarchies and went hot foot into the general destruction—the overthrow of a man.

His money rolled down the bar. Again and again the sons of Bacchus gulped from his cup. With animal-hot eye, he watched the guzzling line. It was not enough; it was too tame. Why did not the breed put him to the test? They were not of his make, or they would show their hands. Well, he would make them, these spineless gulpers. Springing upon a chair, he hurled challenges at the crowd. Any two, any three, any six! What were they waiting for? When they hesitated, he cursed them by all the gods he knew.

As the storm gathered, Old Lucky grew restless. He had never seen Borden like that before. He had just glimpsed the dark face of Pierre at the door, his evil eye fixed on the elevated form of Borden. Crossing the room to where Borden stood hurling taunts at the crowd, Lucky touched his arm.

“Better get down and come with me into the cool air, boy. This won’t do. Something will happen, sure.”

Borden stepped down and peered into the old man’s face.

“The devil’s loose in me to-night, Lucky; I

can feel him. I'm where I'd kill if there was a reason for it."

"What in tarnation has struck you? I never saw you in such a shape before. You'll do something you'll be sorry for if you don't look out. I tell you, boy, it won't do. There's a place to stop."

Borden grew quiet, and his eyes showed that he was thinking.

"I tried, Lucky; sure I did. You haven't seen me here for weeks, have you? No. Well, there's a reason why I'm back. What it is don't matter, only there's nothing in this thing we call the right. I think everything must come to the test of experience, and when it does and you find it false, there's mighty little left. No, I'm done; my vacation's over. Here is where I belong, and here I stay. Watch me, old man, and when you see me heading into something that might lead to the worst, just cut me out. Understand?"

"I'll sure do it, Borden, for you're too good a cuss to be out huntin' a slug or a knife, like this."

"Have you seen Jack Harrington, Lucky? I'm looking for him." The question reached only the ear for which it was intended.

"No; why?"

"Oh, nothing much, only I want to see

him for a minute. Let me know if he comes in, will you?"

"I sure will!" Lucky replied with his lips, but he could have added properly with his mind the word "not."

It was evident to the old man that something had happened in which the gay Jack figured. It would be his aim to keep them apart, if possible.

A whim to treat the other drinking-places right took possession of Borden. He would show them what it meant to be generous. These common shovel knights knew nothing of the spending qualities of a real gentleman. He would teach them the lesson. What was the use of having leases paying big returns if one did not use it largely? In clarion tones he announced that he intended to wash every bar in the camp with wine, and the crowd surged after him.

"Bring my children home again," bantered the bartender of the Bald Eagle.

Old Lucky kept well to the front, close to Borden, as he told himself to see that he did not get into trouble. There is no doubt, however, that Lucky had a long tooth for the mixtures which the different bars would set out with a fine eye for trade, and he looked well to securing his full share.

As the bellowing herd went down the street, Kelly pushed in close to Borden.

"You're making a blamed fool of yourself to-night, Borden. Keep this up and I'll cut the blankets with you. I don't mind a little fun, but you're acting worse than a locoed horse. You've spent a hundred dollars now, and it ain't ten o'clock."

"Wish some of these other fellows would come along with something like that; I'd have a reason to throw them into the street. But what are you preaching about! When I wanted to do the square thing, you made all manner of fun of me. Don't come around now with your anxiety for my money. I've lost more than that in this game. You're a lucky dog, Jim. Everything comes your way. But there's nothing for me but the worst. I'm built on that plan."

Jim turned away and went thoughtfully back to the cabin, where he lit the lamp and sat down to think. Perhaps he had been a fool, also. He was sorry that he had not encouraged his partner in his desire to be a better man.

Borden fully redeemed his promise. Every bar in the camp foamed with liquor, and the dance-halls thrilled with the animal spirit which he took into them. At twelve of the

night the pack was surging into the Bald Eagle for a closing orgy. Old Lucky had kept his place beside Borden. His poison-seasoned thews had reached a place in the process of dry rot where they yielded to no sudden flow of blood; therefore, it was said no man had seen him drunk. One thing was his always . . . a deep-seated demand for liquor.

In the dance-hall, Borden whirled in wild circles, shattering the sordid commercialism into something like gaiety, and creating a sensation among the new arrivals, who stared at this tempest man in astonishment.

"When you goin' to bring the Queen back, Borden?" asked Fiddling Brown, lowering his violin, and wiping the sweat from between the thumb and front finger which gripped the neck.

"You'll be an older rascal than you are now, Brown, before I do that. She's doing well. Looks as clean as a lily, and, so far as I'm concerned, she don't come back. I'd take the rest out, if I could."

"God! I miss the Queen!" Brown's words were full of the negative which indicated that Borden's moralizings had made no impression upon him.

In the main room a game was in progress. Stakes went to the clouds, and men held their breaths. Disgusted, a player left the table, and

Borden took his place. Hours passed, while the green monsters played tricks in his brain. His wits became condor-keen. He won and lost, lost and won. The game closed in a free fight, which grew out of a charge of cheating which one who didn't know him made against Borden. When it was over, he stood alone in the room. About him were broken chairs, and the tables with legs pointing at the ceiling. Cards and chips littered the floor, and here and there a hat showed that the men who had taken part in the melee had gone in great haste. Borden surveyed the wreckage and laughed.

The gray of dawn was streaking the east as he left the Bald Eagle and took the path toward his cabin, in his pockets a double share of the winnings.

XVI

LAUGHING BROOKIE'S COMPLAINT

GENE was not surprised to hear of Borden's excess. In fact, she had expected just that. Though she grieved secretly, there was no outward sign. In the little powder cabin the lessons went on as usual, and down at the end of the hill the roar of the stamps ceased not, day nor night.

The Queen watched her friend with eyes filled with wonder. There was something baffling about this woman with the glorious face and bright hair; something she could not fathom.

The days passed, and Borden continued on his wild career. Sometimes, not often, Gene saw him on the trail, but his greetings were from a distance. She knew that he had come to doubt her. Once he had believed her perfect; now he looked upon her as one able to take interest in the unworthy. Still, her woman eyes read below this stormy surface, and her heart bled. Often, after these meetings, she would slip from the path into the aspen groves,

and there pour out her longings in prayer, while her eyes, blinded with hot tears, saw only the picture of a man transformed.

Like overcharged nature, which finds relief in sweeping wind and roaring flood, Borden gave channel to his feelings. From The Color, Gene learned of his deepening excess. Not that Borden was over-bibulous, but that he swept others to the very vortex of sin. Each day Jim talked the matter over with The Color, who took her heartache to Gene, not knowing what the hearing of these tales caused her to feel.

In all the swift rush of his torn soul there was one thing which to Gene was like the touch of cold water to a thirsty tongue: Borden kept the old landmark of his moral character where he had first placed it. Through melee and free-for-all fight, many of which he started himself, he stormed with the light of battle upon him, but the painted sirens of the dance-halls waited for his coming in vain. Drink he did; not because he liked it, but because it turned the devil loose in him. In his stormy mood inaction was torture. In the tunnel he endured Kelly's lectures in silence, his dark eyes blazing, while he struck violet fire from the drill-head, blow on blow.

Days passed into weeks, but Borden relaxed

not from the career upon which he was launched. He had concluded not to seek a meeting with Jack Harrington. That would be against his own independence in the matter. Sometimes, when stirred by the green demon, he would go from saloon to saloon to find the gay cavalier, but failed for the very simple, though excellent, reason, that the dashing gentleman kept clear of his path. When he had seen the derelict going to the Truxton cabin, it had brought forth smothered oaths, and a double measure of disorder in the Bald Eagle that night. Jim had come to look for the outbursts which always followed these visits. Gene, also, saw the matter clearly, but held firmly to her way, and—waited.

It was at this time that the factional lines began to be clearly defined. Pierre had not forgotten, and subtly he drew the old element around him. With every twinge of his wounds he had registered a vow against Borden and all who had taken sides with him that day. The old lawlessness began to manifest itself. Lone Pass was the scene of many stage robberies. Packers and drivers came to know the stare of level revolvers by looking down their ominous throats. These, held heart-high, were the last argument in the hands of the agents.

In Deadman and other camps, more grue-

some evidences of the "gang" were to be found. A body with a gash in the throat, and the chipmunks playing over it, was one thing that bore witness. A feeling of fear and uncertainty took possession of the camp. Bearded men met in out-of-the-way places and discussed the danger. Something must be done at once.

Meantime, Pierre, with the keen perception which is natural to one of his stamp, saw the trend of events clearly. When patience had been exhausted, wild work would follow, and the trees would grow strange fruit. He had seen this in other places, and he understood. It would not do for him to be caught napping; therefore, he attended meetings of protest and spoke savagely of the murderous practices. He claimed to have been the victim of several hold-ups, in which he lost much money. He even tried to treat Borden as if there had been no differences between them. From being a solitary at the bar, he became as reckless in his spendings as Borden himself. Slowly the suspicion regarding him grew less, and men began to look elsewhere for the dragonish head of the monster which claimed regularly its toll of blood.

The election drew on, and Pierre announced himself as candidate for sheriff of the community. As the voters were to be found in the

camps principally, and as these were in the grip of the Judas element, he hoped to win. It all turned out that way, for the wily Frenchman claimed an easy victory over his honest miner opponent.

With the election of Pierre came a louder, more defiant note in all the saloons and dance-halls. A certain swagger appeared among those who had been modestly quiet before. Characters which had kept in the background till now made loud announcement of themselves. There was one change, however; no more bodies were found in Deadman, though these ghastly relics were as numerous as ever in other towns and on the trails. Thus the summer passed, with the poisonous yeast of crime working an evil brew.

Gene, with a great ache in her heart, and her eyes misty with unshed tears, went firmly on her way. If the hot pools which lie so close to the brain ever spilled over it was when none could see or know. Only once did her resolution give way. The Color had been rehearsing a night of unusually wild things at the Bald Eagle, in which Borden had been the leading spirit. Certain it was, he was fast drifting to the irreparable plunge of fixed evil. The thought had brought a misery to Gene's heart which seemed to crush it; and, when the girl

had stopped, touching her soft, young cheek understandingly to Gene's, her strength had failed, and the two women wept their tears together. This was unusual, for Gene's manner always had been one of calm cheerfulness.

One day Gene received an unexpected call from Laughing Brookie. He first entertained her with all the latest tricks which he had taught his dog, before coming to the purpose of his visit. She let him get to it in his own way, and with many interruptions of laughter the old man covered the ground of their former conversation. Things were getting altogether too scarlet down Bald Eagle way. The devil was getting into the stew completely, and he would kick over the whole dish in his majesty's good time. Brookie was concerned. Men are known by their proverbs, and by that test the old man had come of a tree which sent its roots deep into Puritanic soil; howbeit, a soil well weeded of the cruder conceptions of right living. Something must be done for old, battered drills like himself. The saloon was a poor place to die in, and a worse place in which to live. It had been all a miserable mistake, but there had been no other place to go. If there were such a place, he, Laughing Brookie, would quit the whole thing clean. He had reached the end; he had enough of the whole proposition. But

he'd ax her pardon for bothering her, for he didn't suppose nothin' could be done.

Gene had been thinking rapidly while the old man went over the folly of his life, and the influences which had made him what he was. She raised her eyes and looked at him keenly.

"If I can arrange a plan, will you help me, Brookie?"

"That I will, Miss; try me. Such old loafers as me and Sluicy and Old Lucky aught'a be gittin' out'n the game, for one of these days we're goin' cash in all to onct."

Gene asked for a few days to work out her plans; then she consulted her father, who entered heartily into them. He agreed that she might draw on his account to a staggering sum, and he would take the responsibility of superintending the matter, as far as possible.

There was much curiosity among the bar-keeps and saloon-owners of the camp as to what the new enterprise might be. The men who cleaned out the long log building fronting squarely on Main Street knew only that the superintendent's daughter was paying them to do it. Brookie kept the secret—and laughed.

"That means something that will work against our business," big Pat Sullivan had said to a fellow liquor-dealer, when discussing the matter over the bar, "and if it gets in my

way—well, I'll set fire to the whole shooting-match, that's all."

When the place had been thoroughly cleaned, tables were brought in and shelves made for books. The great fireplace was prepared against winter. Cords of pitchy wood were piled at the rear. Cases for ore samples were made and put along the side. Plenty of comfortable chairs were brought in. By a system of piping, a drinking faucet was put in the building. Above this was a motto which read, "What God intended a man should drink." This was destined to give rise to many heated discussions as to the relative virtues of water and alcohol, with much loss of temper. However, Gene felt it would do good at least in suggesting the right thing. There was one point of comfort regarding this motto . . . they all practiced it.

There was some discussion between Gene and her father as to what should be put over the door. In the ethical mind of Gene Truxton, "Soul's Rest" seemed the proper thing; but the mere suggestion of such a name set the superintendent fuming.

"Why, confound it, girl! If you put that up, you couldn't get a prospector in with a span of mules. That's too churchy. They'd expect to find a prayer-meeting in full blast. Forget

it! Take something that will make them feel like they own the shebang—Miners' Rest; that's it, Miners' Rest. There's not one in a hundred of them who cares whether he has a soul or not, but they all get tired."

So the sign that went over the door of the new concern read, "Miners' Rest—Welcome." The venture was a success from the first. Brookie was made general manager and seer-after-things, and the confidence put a ring in his laugh that was good to hear.

XVII

THE GATHERING OF THE MIST

THERE were many callers at the Truxton cabin, but Borden came no more. That night by the lake the iron had entered his soul, and he held steadily on his way.

Gene learned with secret joy that he was not drinking. After the first few weeks of setting the pace, he had spent his money wildly for others, but had refused to indulge personally. The melee and the stormy scenes of the animal nature he reveled in, and through them he went with the light of battle in his face; but the rest he put aside.

It all had come as a withering disappointment to Borden. He had felt the stir of elemental love, and he had responded with all his generous nature. Never before had a woman's face seemed glorified, and all he knew of faith or God centered in Gene Truxton. When over his flowering dream fell the frost of doubt, it had left him alone in the midst of an unbearable desolation.

From his cabin door he watched the visits

of the gay Jack to the Truxton cabin with an inner wrath which ate deep. The first stormy outburst had passed, and he was in the habit of standing under the pines listening to the throbbing of Harrington's guitar much as one who hears from his cell the clatter of hammers which are building his scaffold.

Slowly it came to him that he had been a fool; that he had been presumptuous. Why should Gene Truxton look upon him as anything but an ordinary drifter, without pedigree or warrant? The new thought was not productive of humility. After this his independence came to full flower. While he could not blame her for her attitude toward him, yet he would not discount himself seriously. He, too, could stand isolated and unasking to the end of the world. Thus his moods succeeded each other. But neither the iron of his own will nor the wild nights at the Bald Eagle could wipe from his soul the fact that with a deathless hunger he longed for the girl who had entered and left his life so strangely.

Lashed with conflicting feelings, he suffered on, seeking relief in the Berseker whirl of the downtown life.

Gene Truxton had seen the way clearly, and she held firmly to it. Had she been selfish or less strong, she would have yielded

the struggle in the interest of self. This cost her many severe struggles. The stars knew strange things . . . white hands stretched toward them from the aspen glades, and a face set in that glory which is the chief charm of flowers, raised to their clear shining.

Once they met under the pines. He was walking with his eyes on the ground. He did not see her until she was near, then he started and seemed about to speak. But he recalled himself, and, with a look which thrilled her, bowed with unconscious grace and moved away. Gene's heart beat wildly as she watched him till he passed from sight.

She had seen the sorrow in his features, leaving them almost tender. In that moment she longed to speak . . . to tell him that he was misunderstanding her, and that she only wished the best for him. The very strength of him mastered her. In the cool of her own room she sat down to think.

Soon after this, Gene had a call from Brookie, who told her of a youth who was tossing with fever in one of the huts on the hillside. Her name had become well known by camp-fire and trail, and those in pain looked for the coming of the strange girl, whose presence seemed to cheer them back to strength and courage.

For many days the boy lay tossing in delirium. When the flame cooled and his eyes became clear, he saw a woman beside him, the beauty of whose face was bewildering. For hours he had watched in a troubled way, believing her to be some creature from another sphere. Later, when his wits cleared, she had talked to him in a way which not only convinced him that she was altogether corporeal, but that she had a most astonishing way of stirring the heart to better things.

The youth crept slowly back to health, but no word of his past life had escaped the closed lips, and Gene had asked no questions. All he said was, "You have saved my life. If ever I can repay the kindness, I will." After this Gene had seen him with Borden, and felt sad lest the older man's influence prove to be bad.

In this manner the days passed, and the veils of autumn, far-blown and faint, caught here and there on the banked foliage of maple and aspen. Later came the riot of bright hues, making the wilderness a painted pageantry, gaudy and bizarre. Out of the north came a subtle change. The wind bore it upon its wings, and the waters wrought it in ice-crystal at the ends of grass blades and protruding pebbles. Deep in the forest the wild things responded to the change, and altered their social ways. A

weird, elfin life was sensed in the land. With branching antlers, the slate-blue stags took the trails, knights of the wild. Down the winding glades echoed their challenges, and in the coves they fought, as the men did in the Bald Eagle.

Wolves hunted for the winter fat, their long cries startling the solitude. The frost lay white in the damp places in the morning, and the streams were like wine from the leaves which drifted in them. Out of the depths came a promise of sheeted hail and high winds. The pines lifted their voices in a higher key. From far excursions, the miners returned to silent cabin or shack for the winter. Because of this, the Bald Eagle felt a fiercer rush of its swift current, a greater pulsation of its coarse blood.

Borden kept his old place at the head of disorder, fighting for the very joy of combat, and because the fires within him found an avenue of escape in such things. Shoulder to shoulder he and Burke went through melee and mob, and never did they come out vanquished.

Among those who were strongly attached to Borden was the Ruby Kid. Many kindnesses and sundry talks behind closed doors had not been lost. Nor had the boy forgotten the words which Gene Truxton had spoken to him while he lay in the cabin on the slope. Borden had listened to his description of the girl as though

she were a stranger to him, and had kept to the old subject when it was over.

"Don't be a fool like me, Kid," he had said. "Quit it all completely. I'm a devil by nature, I guess, and have to go this way. But you don't. Do as I tell you, not as I do."

The Kid understood, for he had talked with Kelly, though he made no reply. But Borden had reason to remember the fierce light in his eyes afterwards.

The great crash of the factions came one midnight. Scarlet things had been done in the saloons of late, and many wanton murders stained the trails with horror. A gang of blood-letters and robbers was at work in the community. To many it was a certainty that Pierre was the head of this element, only using his office to shield him from suspicion. The Frenchman went heavily armed, his keen glance searching all faces.

Silent as growth, the two elements augmented their strength. There was an instinctive movement among the clans for organization. No man felt safe. Those who had money formulated hard-luck stories, and buried their treasure. Then came the crash. It was the reaction from one of those quiet times which is usually the forerunner of greater excess.

From nightfall every bar in the camp had

been crowded. Men swilled together like swine. Clatter of wheel and sputter of ball mingled with the slap of card and crash of glass. Over all was the snarl of the beast; the gutturals of the throat primordial.

Through this Borden moved like the embodiment of disorder, a mad light of joy on his face. Here was the crash of the ordinary, the wreck of the usual, and he loved that—loved it because for a time it took him from his prison-house of thought. Up in the tunnel, where he and Kelly struck turn by turn, he said nothing; but Jim came to know his thoughts by the fierceness of his blows. When anger burned in him he struck flame from the drills, or heaved two men's loads into the car.

The stars might have told why on this night he outdid himself in wild abandon. Had he not stood under the grieving pines the night before, while Harrington's guitar sent its silver tinklings down the aspen way! Old Lucky had reached that stage where the potations of fiery death caused slight irritation, but it must be said to his credit that he watched over Borden with a devotion which always recalled that stormy spirit from going too far.

A charge of cheating at one of the tables condensed the insipient hatred. In an instant all was bedlam. The sound of blows was as the

falling of sledges. Men wallowed together in the spew and filth, gouging, biting, strangling. Ten couples were settling differences, real or imaginary. Faction stood up against faction. Fist met fist, knife crashed on knife.

It was as the opening of a prison gate to Borden, and he towered above a dozen sprawling forms, out of which Pierre leaped and vanished through the door. Through this went Burke, on fire with liquor. When the crash was past, it was found that the miners were in possession of the field . . . the gamblers, with their leader, were gone. Borden looked at the wreck and laughed. There was something grotesque in the disarray. The legs of the overturned tables pointed meaninglessly at the spots on the ceiling. Then, too, there was such an interruption of purpose in the littered cards and shattered chips. He imagined the mental changes which went with this chaos. For a moment he felt the old thrill of mirth, the first that had come to him in weeks.

"We ought to finish the work," he said to Burke; "bar, barrels and all."

With Old Lucky shambling beside him, Borden took the path toward his cabin, giving his companion a short good-night at the parting of the ways.

It was reserved for the day, however, to

bring forth those revelations which brought things to a crisis in the camp. With empty hands and pockets, two miners had gone from the games to separate cabins, desperate and excited. The morning revealed their bodies hanging stiff at the ends of ropes fastened to the ridge-poles of the houses. Each had scrawled brief messages of farewell to families in the East. Besides these, a third relic of the scarlet flood was a corpse in an alley, with a slash under the breast-bone, and his pockets turned. It was time a stop was put to the reign of terror. The miners were moved by a common impulse. They drew together to plan for public protection. There was work to be done by those with steady hands and iron nerves.

XVIII

THE EYE AT THE CHINK

IN the most secret part of a piny hollow stood an old cabin, built long before by some miner who burrowed there till the snow of some forgotten winter had melted. Many of its chinks had fallen out, and the shake roof turned only part of the rain. It consisted of one large room with a dirt floor. About the hut the hemlocks stood dense and shadowy. It was a spot seldom visited, save by chipmunks and scolding pine squirrels.

But the old trees which stood guard over the battered relic saw strange things, for out of the moonlight came swift, shadowy forms, which glided wraithlike through the forest. It was the hour, and at least twenty had arrived.

At the door stood a man who demanded of each a single word, which, uttered in his ear, gained admission. Other forms materialized, and the space was soon full. In the center of the room stood a table with a chair beside it. The men lounged against the wall or sat cross-legged on the ground.

It was midnight. Certainly there was important business for men holding meeting at such a time. A candle spluttered in its socket, giving a half-light in the room.

With swift, noiseless step a man approached the rear end of the cabin, and, hidden by the mesh of evergreens which banked the wall, stood up with his eye to a chink, through which he saw and heard all that transpired within. Pierre sat at the table. Beyond him, his arms folded, the figure of the Ruby Kid reclined against the wall. The watcher at the chink scrutinized him less critically than the others. The eyes of the boy were often strained at the different openings between the logs, as if to read what might be written in the darkness behind them.

The deliberations were not long, and the lone spy could not get all that was said, but he heard his own name spoken repeatedly, and in such manner as brought to his lips a thin, hard smile. Enough leaked through the chink, however, to tell the watcher that the gang was planning to organize on more cautious lines, their chief aim being to get possession of the leading resorts of the camp.

Noiseless as a shadow, the spy backed away and glided into the clasping forest. In a secret glen, known only to a few, sat a circle of men,

a half-hundred in number. No man smoked, and all spoke in low, determined tones. Around them were circling thickets and craggy cliffs.

The laurel at the edge of the glade opened and a man entered. He had hurried, for he passed his hand over his forehead to wipe away the moisture. One of the circle rose, and with his hand at his hip advanced toward the newcomer.

"That you, Borden?" he asked in a whisper.

"Yes, Burke; are the rest here?"

"All here. Learn anything?"

"Sure. Didn't hear it all, but enough. Where's Lucky?"

"Here. So is Truxton. He's had experience up Bannock way, in the days of Plummer and Zachery, you know."

Borden stretched himself on the ground at the edge of the circle and rehearsed all he had seen and heard. But of what he had caught regarding himself he said nothing.

Truxton arose. "The lines were already drawn," he said. The time had come that the better element of the camp must take control of things with a firm hand, or the lawless faction would be in the saddle, and crime would be unchecked. Those who heard him knew that he had made such speeches before. Borden lay at the edge of the glade, silent and thoughtful.

There was pale opal in the east when the deliberations were over. All sides of the condition had been discussed thoroughly. It was decided to warn each member of the gang, telling him to leave the camp at once under penalty of death if he refused. If this was not heeded, more serious measures would be used immediately. A committee of investigation was appointed to seek evidence against those suspected of crime. At the center of this inner circle was Borden.

From this time on a change came over the factions. There was less mingling at the bar and less banter. Pierre and his henchmen displayed a growing spirit of swagger and insult. Strong hints of harm to the miners began to be made openly. The gang was confident of their strength, and was sure that their plans would soon put the camp in their power.

Borden had reasoned that Pierre would entrench himself behind property rights if it came to a clean break, and this must be prevented, by all means. The Frenchman's first hint that his plans were known was when he met with an evasive refusal to sell from all the saloon-owners, though they assured him of their friendship secretly. There were reasons for their refusal. The committee had seen them. The sheriff went aside to think. Later, he went

to the secret cabin alone. As he expected, he found the prints of a man's feet in the soft earth in the rear. The riddle was easy to read.

The next thing was to learn if the miners had held any secret meetings. Miners had held such meetings in other places, and their fruit had not looked good to Pierre. In time he learned, quite to his satisfaction, that such was the case. The chief became aggressive, though wary. Always relentless in his dragonish hate of his enemies, Borden was set down for a double portion of his vengeance. He would wait his chance, and when it came he would strike hard.

XIX

THE STRENGTH OF THE WEAK

THERE was an endless charm in the cool quiet of autumn glades, where the vines crept over the ground like runnels of blood, and the aspen thickets were banked gold. Gene was lonely, and there was company in the squirrels. The Color and the Queen were kind; it was not that, but because the answer to her heart's cry was so long delayed. In moments when she stole away to be with the pines, she felt to its aching depths the asking of her soul.

Jim had reported a change in Borden. He had ceased to throw himself so recklessly into the scarlet surge at the Bald Eagle. This had brought comfort to Gene's mind, though the end of the matter seemed farther away than ever before.

Borden was fully persuaded that he was not more desirable to her than any other man; perhaps not so much so as Harrington. Clearly she had preferred the company of the cavalier to his. He could have endured this had it not been for the element of disappointment which

went with it. This threw him back, hard and relentless, on his pride, and, without knowing it, he had tried her soul in a purple Gethsemane.

Once they met in the Miners' Rest, and he had received her kind greeting and the shock of her near beauty with a calm strength which baffled, while it thrilled her.

On one such day as is the glory of the fall-time, the sun dropped out of a clear sky into an eternity of haze. The wan twilight which followed made the peaks look terribly old and gray. Gene left the cabin and went slowly into the crisp forest, where the tall hemlocks stood up like pillars in an elfin court. Over all was a brooding silence, except when some beast of prey gave forth its hunger wail. In a nook, garlanded with the feathery grace of grass, she paused to study a bank of blood willows. Somehow, they reminded her of human hearts. They were so red. Those gray clumps were the other, more sober, experiences of life, while these pooled crimsons were the untold things of the soul. Farther away in a glade, she found deer feeding among the withered mint.

Slowly she went on, feeling the wonder and power of the stainless wild. A pensive longing clung to her, a hunger unfathomed as the nature of women. Close by the trail she sat down, her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes filled with

mystery. The flesh seemed to drop away, and the soul went forth to mingle with the witchery of all things, hovering around its prison like an odor.

Gene felt a strange power upon her. It was as if she could send her thoughts abroad and impress those distant from her. With a start she remembered that she might thus touch the man who dominated her being. Stretching her hands into the moonlight, she called him with a passionate, wordless call. Was there an answer? She could not say. There were choice pearls at the bottom of the pools of fancy, and they were worth gathering.

She was startled from her reverie by the sound of steps. Some one was running down the mountain. She listened. The steps were coming closer. Half frightened, she drew into the shadow. An instant later a form swept the branches aside and bounded into the opening. With the keenness of a wild creature the intruder stopped, sensing her presence, and looked toward where she stood. Gene recognized the Ruby Kid.

"What has happened?" she queried anxiously, a dread of something oppressing her intuitively.

"That you, Miss Truxton?" he asked, out of breath.

"Yes. Where are you hurrying to, and why?"

"I am on the way for help. Borden is in trouble. They have had it in for him all summer. I know. Got him in a cabin up the canyon. They'll kill him, too, before midnight. Pierre's not there—they're waiting for him—don't give me away."

Gene's heart stood still for a moment; then something hard, desperate, thrilled through her.

"Where did you say he is?" she asked, in a voice strangely calm and colorless.

"He's in an old cabin just above this trail, at the edge of a thicket of young firs, about a mile up. It's the end of him if help don't get there before Pierre does. It took twenty of the gang to get him there. My! the fight he put up was something terrible to see."

"Go on!" she commanded, in a voice clear and imperative. "Get Kelly, and Burke, and Old Lucky, and—and the rest! Don't lose a second of time!"

The boy sprang into the trail and darted from sight like a deer. Left alone, Gene felt the full sense of Borden's danger. What if the Kid should have trouble in finding these men? Kelly had spoken of being out of camp that day. Burke might be in some of the cabins. There was no doubt that the gang would wait the

coming of their chief, who would claim the privilege of slaying his enemy. But Pierre might return at any moment. Instantly her thoughts cleared. The Frenchman must not reach the cabin before the rescuers arrived. Turning, she sped down the path toward home.

Entering the cabin, she took something from a drawer that flashed as the firelight fell upon it. This she hid in her dress. Then, with a few words to Aunt Ruth, she went out. With no sense of weariness she ran up the trail, past the spot where she had met the Kid, and on into the deep forest beyond.

Once she paused to listen to the footfalls of some beast of prey, which kept abreast of her in the bordering thickets. She was desperately afraid, but went on, running down the slopes and climbing the steep places without resting. Somewhere ahead in the bewildering mesh of shadow and light was the man she loved—loved! She knew it now as she never dared own it even to herself before. She pictured him bruised, slashed with knives, and wracked with pain. It had taken twenty of the gang to overpower him. That was glorious! But there was blood on his forehead; she was sure of that. He had battled to the last, and had gone down with the old smile on his lips. She knew it. Borden could yield in no other way. She began to see that

this man she was trying to save from himself had great strength of character. Spent with haste, she turned aside and fell upon her knees, asking for strength and courage. She must not fail—God must help her to win.

She judged that she had come nearly a mile, and went on more cautiously. The trail wound through world-old trees, which grew close together. At the farther edge of this grove was an open space, washed now with moonlight. At the right a spread of young evergreens came half-way down the slope, making a toga of dark, dense trees which spread over into a glade beyond.

Gene moved with noiseless step. There were stumps showing here and there among the trees. The cabin was not far away. Listening intently, she made out the low murmur of voices. At first she had taken the sound to be a banter of some small stream, quarreling with its reeds. All doubt was dispelled when a moment later the flare of a match showed the location of the hut.

Creeping under the fringing thickets, she parted the laurel and peered down into the tiny glade. Before the door a half-dozen men lounged upon the ground. One stood guard at the front. She heard the snap of a watch-case, and the comments which accompanied it.

"Might go ahead with the job ourselves," growled one.

"Not on your life! Pierre would riddle the gang with lead. This is his job. There is something personal between them. Has to do with the Queen. You know Borden and that saint from up the trail took her out of the Bald Eagle saloon. Then, there was a shooting-match. Well, it's over that, I think."

"He ought to be here," the others contended.

"Oh, that's all right. Pierre knows his business. You see, it's this way: He has a notion that the Queen will come to think he is all right. Met her down Senora way, and has been on her trail ever since."

"For all of which we don't care a fig. The question is, Why doesn't he show up? It's eight o'clock."

"Which way will he come?"

"Up the trail from town, of course. He wanted to see what was going on down there. He will not stay very long, for he'll want to know our success; whether we trapped the game or not. Nothing doing till he gets here."

Gene had heard every word from the laurel mesh, where she lay hidden. That was enough. Pierre was expected any moment, and he would come by the same path she had. Borden was safe till then. Without making any sound, she

crept away. At the edge of the wood she put her face in her hands and prayed once more. Strengthened, she rose and entered the wood.

At the point where the trees grew close, with a tiny opening, puddled with moonlight beyond, she crept close to a giant tree and waited, her eyes on the little spot through which the trail ran. He would have to come that way. She set a mark—he would not go beyond that young tree at the left. If he attempted it—

Silent as the tree by which she stood, Gene waited. She was strangely calm. She wondered at this. The moment when his form would darken the moonlight drew constantly nearer. She knew that Pierre would take desperate chances, and the thought caused her fingers to close tightly around the checked handle of the automatic.

In the opening below she heard the munching of deer. From a canyon came the gathering cry of wolves. There was something ghostly in the hooting of the owls. The forest was full of strange voices. From the cabin came a burst of coarse laughter. In it lay the man she was risking her life to save—the man she loved!

How long she waited Gene never could tell, for when she looked back at the experience, she only knew that something dark came within the range of her vision, and that she found her-

self at the rim of the moonlight, her hand thrust forward holding the automatic three feet from the breast of the Frenchman. There was a dim recollection of the cold flash of the stars on the steel, and the panther-like crouch of the villain.

Under the spot covered by the revolver, Pierre's heart beat fast with astonishment and fear. From her lips came low words of warning and command, and the man obeyed her.

"Don't move unless I tell you," she cautioned in a voice strangely level in its tones.

She was desperate, but calm. Her own self-possession surprised her. If this worker of evil went on, it must be over her body, and she made him feel just that. Slowly she moved toward him, speaking cold, low words. In her actions and voice he read determination. At her command he raised his hands and turned his face to the tree. Two feet behind him the girl stood strong and lithe in the moonlight, the bit of bunched steel dangerously ready.

The winds lifted up their voices in the trees, and from far came a whisper. The sounds recalled her, and Gene had time to take an estimate of her actions. She had suddenly discovered elements in her nature which she never dreamed were there. In a calmer moment she would have considered it impossible that she

could take part in such wild happenings. She was getting acquainted with her entire self for the first time. There was something splendid in this discovery. She was not afraid now. It was the quality in her womanhood which was capable of vast decisions and issues. On this her sisters had helped shape the vicarious history of the world. Women had gone down to death with the objects of their hearts; they had faced dangers by cliff and stream, even as she was doing; they had been smitten of the sleet and wounded by the hail; fang and claw had been bared against them, and they had been torn, yet they had persevered, with a light in their faces which had been caught from the glance of God.

She was standing under the drip of history—the history of woman—and she was lifting her portion to the level of the heart—the heart surcharged with love as pure as opal fire. Wondrous breast of woman! What mysteries are there. From its snowy depths, what streams go forth, and what flames to warm the universe; there surge the longings which persuade God; there quiver the powers, fond or fatal, which melt or madden; there smokes an altar which will receive no offering less than herself—her soul. Mysterious pillow, where a God once slept; ravishing fountain from which Deity once

drew life. Harp of a thousand strings, played over by the softest, the wildest winds of passion, whose ravishing music is more gently sweet than Chindara's trembling fountain. There leap the visions which inspire the world; there flash the jeweled courts of purity walked by all white angels; there shine the lights of truth like close stars over snow. Into these burning confines the soul of man comes—once, the soul of one man, to meet the soul of woman, to be melted, one into the other, as the tinted mist into the sun.

Actuated by holy passion, Gene was unconsciously keeping her place in the lofty scale of womanhood . . . the queendom of the heart. At last all that was strange in what she was doing passed away, and she began to study the man before her. She saw the faded silk handkerchief which swathed his throat, and knew that he had worn it a long time. She saw, also, that he wore no coat. When he complained that his arms ached she permitted him to put them around the tree, but the pressure of the automatic between his shoulders told him that he must make no effort to escape.

For a time he protested his innocence, and begged to be allowed to go on. Then the crest-fallen chief gave vent to his anger in blasphemy and threats, but the automatic only pressed a

little harder between his shoulders, and the girl's words seemed more full of icy meaning. In this way the minutes passed, while the wind complained bitterly of some old wrong, in the branches, and the strange whisper crept to her out of the far place. But it was not for the wind or the whisper that she listened, but for the tramp of chesty men. When it was yet faint down the trail, the bandit moved uneasily and listened . . . they were coming. The pressure increased between his shoulders. His curses fell upon unhearing ears; his threats were unheeded. At her cold command he raised his hands once more above his head. He knew that the white finger which touched the dog of the revolver needed only to take the slack of it and he would be as the fir against which he leaned. In this manner they remained till the rescuers found them. Gene had raised her finger for silence, and the men took possession of the Frenchman without noise.

It was the work of a moment to bind and gag the outlaw. Then Old Lucky made the one sentimental speech of his life, when he shuffled about muttering broken things about the "Angel of Deadman, for sure"; and that "God Almighty never made a finer job of a woman."

The Ruby Kid said little, only telling Gene that he never had seen her equal.

It was the common opinion of the crowd that there was not another woman on the frontier who could have taken Pierre captive alone. But Gene's heart was in none of this praise, though she well knew that these rugged men meant every word of it. Now that Borden was safe, she thought only of keeping her part of the affair from his ears, and immediately exacted a binding promise from each of the men that such should be the case. Sometime she might give them her consent to speak of it, but not now.

The laurel around the cabin where Borden lay bound knew a strange birth that night, when a score of forms leaped living and terrible from its green loins, and rushed roaring upon the astonished gang before the door. Gene heard the voice of Burke raising his battle-cry, and saw the door lift from its hinges under one of his blows. She waited till she saw Borden spring out, his battered crest unhumbled, then, unseen, she withdrew and sped swiftly down the trail.

XX

THE HUMBLING OF JACK HARRINGTON

TILL the bunch grass grew over him, Old Lucky never ceased to remind the members of the rescue party that the man a woman had captured, alone, had given them all the slip.

The old trailer always considered this a great joke, and he enjoyed telling it, though the others found little satisfaction in the rehearsal. Quick as the spring of a panther, the Frenchman had bounded into the thicket and escaped. A stream of bullets followed him, but they only clipped the laurel, doing no harm. The chief, with the other members of the gang, had not returned to the camp. It would be wise to stay away till things had cooled down somewhat.

Jack Harrington continued to visit the Truxton cabin, and Borden became more set in his reckless career. Periods of calm came to him—periods which ended in wilder seasons of recklessness. The throbbing of a guitar, accompanied by a rich voice, never failed to explode the pent forces within him.

Nothing but pride kept Borden from strang-

ling the conceited cavalier; and even this might have been forgotten had not this son of the Seven Seas kept well beyond the miner's reach.

Jack Harrington was sure that Gene Truxton was interested in him. But to what extent, or in what manner, he was unable to guess. With the penetration of one well read in the arts feminine, he knew her to be different from other women. In spite of himself, he put aside his lighter conceits and fell into a more worthy mood. All that was good in his nature had been stirred. Slowly the mists of error had lifted from his eyes, and he saw things more worthy of the soul. The old abandon dropped from him, and he caught a glimpse of what he might have been—what he might be yet, with this woman beside him. At this point Harrington began to dream a dream, and in it he saw himself redeemed from his old ways. In the vision his head was lifted, and his hand held a very white one—the hand of Gene Truxton.

As the hope ripened, he grew thoughtful. A brooding earnestness came to his eyes, and a richer note to his songs. Gene saw the change, and for his sake drew somewhat away. In her woman's nature grew a large pity, and she wished that she might be a lasting inspiration to this dreamer of light dreams.

With the tantalizing hope and fear ever

before him, Harrington debated his proper course. He must speak some time; that was his way. It was also like him to overrate his power with women, and to be guided more by fancy than reason or love.

It was a calm autumn night, with a clear, high moon, when, suddenly putting aside his guitar, he launched into a rehearsal of his life. Frank as the stars above them, he told her all; of women who had clung to his neck; of that one found at the rim of the sea, foam-covered and white. Nothing was omitted. There had been nights in Venice under the gondolier's song; and gay meetings in perfumed Parisian boudoirs. English Marys had mourned for him, and Irish Noras as well. Hawthorn and holly had seen his victories. But of all this he was ashamed now. There was a change. Since meeting her, there had come to him a desire for better things. To what heights of achievement he might climb with her face before him, her hand in his.

Through the long rehearsal of waywardness and heartbreak—a course which had touched the man's face with the stamp of wrong-doing—Gene listened with a deepening sorrow of heart. It was not pleasant to cover the opening roses in the garden of the man's soul with frost, but he must know the impossibility of his dream.

Kindly, almost tenderly, she made the wound, yet so swiftly did she follow it with the oil and wine that the man felt moved to fall at her feet and put the hem of her garment to his lips. Frankly she showed him her heart. In it there was only friendship for him. If he redeemed himself, she would be proud, and it would be one of the comforts of her life to know that she had, even in a small way, contributed to the impulse which might lead him to win the crown of manhood—the glittering crest of honor.

As her lips spoke away his hope and put her forever out of his life, save as a friend, he did not once take his eyes from the wondrous face. Then slowly the impossibility of it all came to him. The thing about her which had made her different from all women he had known was that which would keep her from him. He began to see that, after all, the thing which had been the most attractive in this woman was the fact that she was good, and the discovery thrilled him with a delicious self-respect. He also saw that he desired the ideal of his soul more than that which had inspired it. Gene saw this, and set him right with a firmness which left no ground for misunderstanding.

For some time they sat in silence when she ceased speaking.

"I should have known it was all impossible," he said at last. "I who have been the knight of Vagabondia—how could I ask so much of you? The vulture never mates with the dove. But there is much in a vision, and, no matter what I may yet be, I have lifted the veil and have looked upon the uncovered face of truth. That image must remain."

He rose and held out his hand. She permitted hers to rest in it for a moment, then gently withdrew it.

"This is not dismissal; you may come as before," she said, frankly.

"I will; but you must forget all I have said to-night. Let it be as though it never were uttered. It was all a mistake; I see it now."

With a clear good-night, he turned into the trail, and was almost immediately lost from sight under the hemlocks.

XXI

THE AWAKENING

WITH a blast of bugles the white cavalry of winter charged across the hills. Storms lifted up their trumpets on the peaks, and whirling hail sheeted the wilderness.

Out of the fastnesses came the wild things. Wolves boomed at the very rim of the camp, and the forest herds streamed to the greasewood pastures of the lowlands. Foot on foot the white fluff accumulated in the mountains. The trees stood still and laden. Forever the winds wailed around the icy cliffs. Nature bowed herself and birthed her children. With a hissing sound the small snow eddied in blinding clouds. The storm had a belligerent whine. There was challenge in the night. Wild anarchy reigned where soft-eyed summer had brooded by pool and bower. The stars were gone; the moon came no more.

Gene had expected to leave the mountains before the coming of the snow, but so sudden was its appearance that she was compelled to wait till it settled. Aunt Ruth had found the

high air not the best for her cough; this, added to a lawful homesickness, had set that good woman's mind firmly to return to what she was pleased to call real civilization.

The thought of going brought a feeling of relief to Gene. It would be better for her to be far away from the trail up which she often saw a strong form swinging. It had been hard to see him standing in his cabin door, the slanting sunshine falling over him, looking with unseeing eyes.

In the time of her preparation, while the storm raged, she had many heart talks with The Color and the Queen. In one of these she had said something about Jack Harrington's confession. It was in a thoughtless moment when she and the girl were alone in the powder cabin, and she had not told her not to mention the matter to Jim. In no great time this had dropped from the lips of the candid girl into the ears of Kelly, who had promptly joked Borden about it. Borden's eyes, which were either a blaze of resistance or a gloom of dreams, flashed dangerously.

"What did she say?" he asked in tones hard as flint.

"Don't know. Think it must have gone all right for Jack. He is still going there. I never saw him so quiet."

"He's playing the hypocrite, that's all!"

Borden looked the misery he felt. If Kelly had thought to rouse Borden from his mood to a better one, he instantly saw his mistake. An hour later, when he saw him slip a revolver into his pocket, he took genuine fright.

"See here, Bord, you've been acting the blamed fool long enough. Put that thing back and behave yourself before you get in deep. It's been a misery to be around you for weeks. What's struck you, anyway?"

Borden made no reply, but, pushing his partner aside, went out into the gathering twilight. The snow lay smooth and white over the land. Gray clouds drifted across the sky like things of ill omen. In the saloons he learned that Harrington had been called into the mountains before the storm. He knew the place. The cavalier had interests there, and often visited it.

That night he returned early and retired, but at daybreak he was breasting the deep drifts in the canyon as he battled toward the summit. Far above him glittered the pass through which the half-broken trail wound. With a relish he fought the baffling smother foot by foot. Only in a vague way did he try to analyze his mood. Never before was he in a frame of mind to take life. Even now he

denied it to himself. It would be a relief to look through the pass. True, Jack Harrington was where he was going; but Jack Harrington would be all right if he kept out of the way. But that was sure not to happen. In fact, he planned fiercely that it should not.

As midday approached, the gray mass above him began to drop rain, and a Chinook wind came soft as a baby's breath from the southwest. In a little time the laden trees began to drop their burdens, the branches swinging up to their old positions with many courtly bows. Masses of snow slipped from the wall-rocks and rolled down the hillsides.

Borden watched the developments critically. Long experience in the mountains had taught him his danger, and he hurried on, apprehensive of the smooth, wide surfaces above him where thousands of tons of snow hung suspended, rain-soaked and ready.

Hot and overwrought, he reached the pass, and leaned against a tree to rest. It may have been the touch of the soft wind, or the loneliness of his position, that caused him to fall into a troubled state of thought. The thunder of a distant avalanche did not disturb him. He was counting the times he had stood under the pines listening to the throbbing of Harrington's guitar. Over against the brazen self-conceit of

the rogue he set his own honest efforts to be better, and his secret pain. Only by the vilest deception could this man win the heart of Gene Truxton. Gradually a new view of the case began to deceive him. He had been wronged, and now the woman he loved was about to be wretchedly deceived by the man he was hunting. How could this wretch, this chip from the forest of abandon, have reached the point of offering himself in marriage to this woman by anything else? An oath rose sizzling to his lips. If only he could meet him now!

The wish was father to the fact, for, turning, he saw Jack Harrington coming down the slope. He waited till he was a dozen paces away and stepped forth. Harrington saw his danger in Borden's eyes and drew back.

"You can't run this time, Jack, and you must take yours. You have lied to her, told her a fair tale. I have suffered, and can suffer more, but you shall not ruin her life; I'll kill you first."

Throwing back his coat, Borden drew the weapon from its holster.

"You are armed; prepare to defend yourself, Jack Harrington. I'll not take advantage of you. You have a man's chance. Now, be quick!"

Borden's hand shot out straight, and a quick

report rattled up to the cliff before a word of protest could be uttered. Harrington fell a huddled heap into the drifts. Borden walked to where he crouched and looked curiously at the man's face, almost as white as the snow. There was a growing spot of crimson under the right temple which fascinated him. He watched it widen in the ermine element. All he had read or heard of blood-shedding rushed through Borden's mind. He had killed a man! Slowly the thought took fearful shape in his mind. His mood changed, and he began to see what he had done. The pendulum swung back with an awakening crash. The creaking of a dead tree caused him to start up and peer around. He had heard that every seed brings its kind; that out of the sowing of a man comes his harvest. He had been sowing to death for weeks, and now he must reap it. With rasping oaths he cursed himself for a fool—a madman! The ghost of Cain seemed to whirl by on the cloudy wings of the mist; and now he, too, would wander over the world, marked and constantly slain, but never could he cross the widening blot which began on the snow at his feet.

A vast pity for the huddled shape took possession of him. There was something pathetic in the wilt of the hands. What witness to his folly! In the bitterness of his regret he looked

up. As he did so, the rain fell gently upon his face. Something in its cool touch encouraged him. The cloud which had settled upon his soul lifted a little. It seemed strange that the rain would touch him. Was there not something—some one—back of the rain that was also kind? He crushed his hands in agony. “God!” he moaned, “this is awful!” He looked about, his temples throbbing wildly. “God!” he repeated. But there was no answer, save the sound of the wind, which seemed shaping itself into the fearful words: “Too late! Too late!”

With an oath he threw the revolver far into the snow. Then kneeling, he placed his hand over Harrington’s heart. Thank Heaven! he was still alive. Hastily examining the wound, which was close to the temple, he found it only a skin affair. The man would revive presently.

Reaction from the strain of a moment before set in. He felt a surge of gratitude sweep over him. As by a miracle he had been spared a life-long misery, and he was thankful. In the fervor of his changed mood he began talking to Harrington in the companionable speech of the hills. Even now it seemed impossible that it was his hand which had done this deed, or that it could have been his soul which had harbored so black a purpose. New and strange sensations were moving him. He never had felt condemnation

before. Till now, he had found some excuse for what he did; but he was surprised to find that he did not wish to justify what he had done. Rather, he heaped abuse upon himself.

A dash of snow in the face, with vigorous rubbing, restored Harrington to consciousness. For a time his gaze wandered over Borden's face in a mystified way. Finally a wan smile came to his lips, and he endeavored to sit up. Borden carried him to a tree, propping him against the trunk, and sank down beside him, grasping his hand.

"God, Jack! I'm glad you're alive!" he blurted out impulsively. Borden felt the hand he held tighten faintly over his.

"You shouldn't have felt that way, Borden; we are neither of us worthy to touch the hem of her garment, to say nothing of winning her love. Men like us can't do that. She's a hundred times too good for any man on earth. I see it now and am satisfied. I was wrong to think anything else, but—I needed her—that is—I thought I did. I was a fool. Her heart is as distant from me as a star."

"Can you forgive this piece of work, Jack?" Borden implored.

"Yes; think no more of it. I understand. Now, if you'll help me to my feet, I think I can walk."

"I'll tell the boys all about it when I get to camp, and they can do what they think is best," said Borden, helping Jack to rise.

"You'll do nothing of the kind. Many is the little fray I've had, growing out of amours here and there, and they were not worth the powder, either. Spitted a high-bred Castilian with a Spanish rapier who objected to my successful advances toward his mistress. The man got well and had more sense. The Senorita—sorrow to her—had a sweet voice—as the lovers of that land say, '*Su voz es dulce conmovedora y melodiosa*,' but she emptied my purse and then threw a thistle at me from her casement when I was expecting a red rose. I was told she married the dog afterwards."

"I was a chump. I have done too much hot thinking of late. If you will do it, I'll take your place and you can have a shot at my head. It would be right."

Harrington laughed. "I'll do that one thousand years from now, Borden. Here, give me your shoulder. I'm a little groggy. It's cold, too, isn't it?"

The man he had come miles through the snow to kill, Borden was steadying down the trail with his arm about him. So swift and unexpected are the changes of purpose in the heart of man.

Silently, steadily, the rain continued to fall. Softly the Chinook swooned across the white waste. All the snow had fallen from the trees, and they stood clean-washed pyramids in the measureless reaches of white. Borden found the man leaning heavily at the end of half a mile, and it was ten to the camp. The short winter day was nearing its close, and there was prospect that they would have to spend the night in the mountains.

"There's a cabin down in the canyon, Borden. Guess we better turn in. I can't go much farther."

"You're cold, too, Jack; you are shivering. God! what a devil I am!"

After a hard hour breaking trail through waist-deep snow, Borden reached the door and cleared a space so it would open. Once inside, it was the work of a minute to have a fire going in the fireplace, which seemed to have been waiting to serve an emergency. Stretched on some discarded blankets, Harrington was soon comfortable. Borden found some tea in a can, and prepared a hot drink by melting snow. The steaming element brought new energy to Harrington's body.

Night fell early, starless and abysmal. Out of the cavernous dark came the steady rush of the rain and the sighing of the wind through

the firs. Save for occasional outbursts against himself, Borden said little. He prepared several brews of tea, and ministered to the wounded man as tenderly as a woman. When Harrington's deep breathing told that he was asleep, he rose and looked for food. He was hungry. It had been hours since he had eaten. But there was nothing to be found. What might have been left was long ago purloined by chipmunks and squirrels.

Going to the door, Borden stood looking out into the castled gloom. The murk seemed to clasp him about like an ill-omen. There was something appalling in the intense earnestness of nature. The rain fell as if driven by the hand of justice. Out of the depths came a soundless moan, a voiceless regret. The wild threnody in the pines moved Borden strangely. A cold touch of fear fell upon his soul. He shuddered and drew back. For once in his life he felt afraid. It was the dread of right, the frown of God! The loneliness was overmastering—smothering. The heavy breathing from the bunk was dreadful. The man might, after all, be dying.

Borden crept to the bed and studied his face anxiously; then he threw on wood and returned to the door. As he peered into the stacked shadows, two gray forms glided wraithlike

through the belt of light, on into the depths beyond. A moment later the meat-call of the pack boomed shudderingly along the cliffs.

"They are trailing the blood," he mused bitterly. "I made that trail; I, too, am a beast."

Somewhere a dead tree toppled and fell with a lingering thud which struck the night like a blow in the face. There was menace on all sides. He seemed adrift upon a shoreless sea without rudder or chart. Circling furies were sucking him down; yawning whirlpools were waiting to swallow him. All about him—in him—there was condemnation. Fingers took shape in the mist and pointed as they passed; hideous faces peered at him with revolting grins. Regret rode the trembling stretches of his soul, trampling it fearfully. Some terrible doom seemed at hand. Out of the black immensity came merciless accusations. Borden shrank back and closed the door. Once more he supplied the fire with wood, and, sitting down, buried his face in his hands. In spite of his efforts, he groaned with misery. Starting up, he glanced at his companion; he still slept quietly.

Never before had Borden suffered condemnation for his wickedness. For a time he feared that he was going mad, and he thought of the automatic lying deep in the snow of the pass. Under a monster weight he seemed crushed to

the earth. "O God!" burst from the inmost depths of his spirit. Could Gene Truxton have heard that cry she would have raised her white hands, and with streaming tears have given thanks for it. But she did not know.

Restless and desperate, shut up to remorse, Borden paced the floor. He was tired and overwrought, he told himself. What he needed was sleep and rest. He would be all right in the morning. Throwing himself down beside Harrington, he lay watching the red embers of the hearth, and trying to put everything out of his mind, but the spots grew larger; widened till they covered the earth, and over the vast crimson field he was walking a hunted Cain.

XXII

THE HOUSE OF PAIN

ONLY the rain and the night knew the moment of it—the night and the fiends of the storm.

Soft as the breath of woman the Chinook continued to blōw, till the white mass lay sodden and dangerous over the hills. Hour by hour the wind clipped the cables which kept it in place; moment by moment the rain coaxed it to the plunge. Silently the tawny ruin waited—waited the high moment, for nature has such moments; so have battlefields; so has the heart; points of time into which great happenings run. These are the seconds which reveal God and interpret Being.

And Borden slept, and dreamed as he slept that he walked on red earth, and that he was the companion of Macbeth, and knew not that this was the hour of the snow. In the watches after midnight it came; the time when the bravest fear. The cliffs had waited for it; the forests had lifted up feathery protesting hands, but it came, a thundering, relentless hate.

At the first sliding sound, the waiting immensity grew tense; then the hills broke into rattling hurrah! Where an instant before had been standing trees and smaller growth, there was now the stripped earth, while below the dense pack filled the canyon, a hundred feet deep, and mid-center of the crush were the scattered cabin and the two men.

Borden regained consciousness slowly. He realized, vaguely at first, that he was being held down by a vast, crushing weight. He was smothered for breath. There was a maddening whisper in his ears. He was buried at the heart of the world—all mountains were above him. He tried to contract his muscles, but could not accomplish the slightest movement.

Gradually his mind cleared and he began to realize what had happened. He had helped take many others from their snow graves. Why had he not thought of the danger? Dimly he remembered the height of the mountain which had sent this mass upon him. It must be deep, very deep. This was the end. In a few hours at most he would be dead. The length of time depended on the amount of air stored in the pack.

In time his mind became clear. He was not injured, and, strange to say, he found the same agony of soul, which he had known when he

went to sleep, was still his, only it was intensified seven-fold. The blood spot on the snow was ghastly as ever, and deeper of stain. He tried to put it away, but it held at the core of his being. In an instant Borden saw his heart, with its black well, from which all the wickedness of his life had flowed. The sight filled him with agony. The sting of conviction scorched him like fire. He groaned in spirit, and was troubled. Had he been in the gracious sunshine, he would have called aloud that Heaven might hear and forgive. The excesses of his life swept past, each one pausing to drop upon his conscience its own leaf of nettle. Borden felt he must die of agony before the air supply had been exhausted.

In his ears dinned the snarl of the Bald Eagle crowd, and it was as the wailing of lost spirits to him. Through the bedlam of abominations he saw himself, pleased with it all, reveling in it. There he had struck men, and they had bled—bled much. It had looked good to him then; it had proved that he was fit; now it was strangling him. Always it was this thought, this vision of blood, that was before him. Though packed in the ice crush, Borden felt hot as with fever.

If only he could cry aloud, but that was impossible; the cold element held his lips as if to

prevent him. Then he remembered his reckless blasphemy. It seemed dinned into his ears oath by oath. He had never heard his own voice before. How fearfully it was accentuated in his brain. A mountain of guilt crushed him in spirit, even as the snow of the slide pressed his body. It was horrible!

Out of the cold mist which ever had hung over his upward glance, came the face of God, and in it there was no warmth, no pity. It was all clear in an instant. The knowledge of sin came from an understanding of God and the character of God. In his wickedness he had been in rebellion against the Infinite. Now he must reap his choice, and only he was to blame. He saw his own selfishness for the first time, and that his efforts at goodness were the merest hypocrisy. Only one thing could he find to be glad for—he had honored womanhood. Strange that he should have drawn the line there. This was all. Buried with him, and dead, too, perhaps, was the man he had tried to murder. There was the blood on his face and hands and over all the snow; and he must die—die with despair brooding vulture-like over his soul. Die, with the burning glance of remorse eating into his very being. If such agony could haunt the last moments, to what endless stretches of time beyond the last breath might

it not reach? Forever he must feel the sting of guilt and see that fearful stain. If only there was mercy! If only Harrington might live! These things were impossible; he faced retribution without a star in the sky of justice.

From depth to depth he fell, and in each he found a more rending agony. Once more the words burst unsyllabled from his soul, "Great God!" Then darkness.

When consciousness returned, Borden was suddenly aware that he could move his head, and that one arm was free. Something had happened, and that something was the fire. The stones had been red hot when he went to sleep. The snow was melted about him. A wild hope surged through him, and with it a feeling that unmerited mercy was giving him another chance. All he had felt of unworthiness was merged into gratitude, and he wept. Naturally, he fell into the channels of a forgotten language: things his mother had taught him. He could say little, however, for smothering emotions swept over him, and with them a new and penetrating joy.

XXIII

A STAIR THAT WAS CRYSTAL

BORDEN soon worked himself free. Taking his knife from its scabbard, he cut the snow away, and was able to move about in a small cavity. The heat melted what he had loosened, and he began to search about to find Harrington. Sharpening a piece of wood, he made holes in the softening mass to let in the prisoned air. The feel of logs told him that the cabin had not been moved far, and he was sure that his companion was near where the bunk had been.

A moan told him that Harrington was alive. After half an hour of work he was able to draw him into the cavity, and found that he was hurt rather seriously, though his injuries consisted mostly of bruises from the collapsing cabin. Once he had cleared a space in which he could move, Borden began to exercise his wits. The darkness was utter, and the horror of the grave filled the place. They knew that there were mountains of snow heaped above them.

The presence of trees through the pack might admit sufficient air to sustain life, for these had prevented the snow from losing what was buried with it. If this were the fact, then he might in time dig out. He must cut a passage to liberty. Without a moment's hesitation, he began his work. In an hour he could stand upright; in what he judged to be half a day he had made ten feet of passage.

The ceaseless use of arm and wrist caused both to ache miserably. The end of the knife handle working in the palm of his hand caused it to bleed from ruptured blisters, which added to his wretchedness. But there was hope that they would see the goodly sun again. The stored heat constantly enlarged the opening, and caused a slush which soaked them both to the skin.

Borden found trees crossed in endless confusion, and these often forced him to turn aside from a straight course. There was an advantage in this, however, for they made places where he could stand. Endlessly, Borden cut and slashed at the ice above him; inch by inch he worked his way.

All means of knowing time were gone. He judged of this by the deepening ache in his shoulders and the weariness of his body. Yet, he allowed himself only brief periods of rest,

after which he renewed the stabbing and cutting at the stubborn mass above him. Harrington was not to be outdone. He enlarged his place with the point of a broken board, meantime calling cheer to his companion, who constantly showered him with the snow which he cut away.

Borden found it difficult to keep from growing feverish and impatient. Despair hovered close. In his work he thought of many things. Above all, he wished for a chance to prove himself. He had failed utterly in his effort to do right before, but there was a difference now.

Of the change that had come to him, Borden had no clear idea. He knew peace where there had been mountainous weights of despair, and that in the balconies of his spirit strange nightingales of joy were singing. The newness of his feelings sustained him, though his wrists were swollen and he felt a faintness at the pit of his stomach. When utter exhaustion came upon him, he rested upon some log around which he had burrowed. These periods were always short, and were followed by stretches of wearisome toil, in which the sheath-knife ate its way into the pack.

A torturing headache came to him, and a shortness of breath, while his neck began to swell from the cramp of looking upward. His shoulders and arms drew into painful knots.

Certainly he had been digging for days. He measured the distance he made while he breathed sixty times; then he reckoned the length of the passage, and divided roughly. According to this, he had been at work two days and two nights.

But there were things to encourage him. He had reached a place where he could scarcely hear the voice of Harrington. Then, he breathed with less difficulty. The snow must be looser. If it was, he was nearing the top. He began to strain his eyes for the faintest reflection, but hours went by before it came, a dim and uncertain glow.

At last the pale glint began to show through the roof of his grave. The end of his task was in sight; soon he would be free. Hope drove the ache from his stiffened body. The wounds in his hands were forgotten. Every slash of his knife increased the brightness above him. He could see his hands now, moving like a shadow over the lighter surface. It was difficult to keep from dropping the knife, his fingers were so stiff. Then, blessed moment! the blade went through. A flood of cold air struck his face, and he stood still gulping in the delicious element. A rush of poisonous heat passed him from below.

Revived, Borden let himself down the opening, and found his companion drinking the air.

He was weak, but cheerful. Placing the wounded man above him, Borden helped him up the passageway, till, with feelings too full for speech, they lay panting on the top of the slide, the sky above them, and the crisp air filling their lungs.

XXIV

MILES THAT WERE LONG

BY the change from rain and Chinook to clear sky and crisp cold, Borden knew that at least three days had passed while he was digging out, but in that time he had cut his way through more than a hundred feet of packed snow.

Turning, he peered intently into the hole out of which they had come.

"That represents a million stabs, Jack, if not two of them," he commented.

Harrington tried to smile, in spite of his weakness. Borden looked at him intently.

"It represents more than that, for by it I have climbed out of—hell! I went up that trail to find you, to do—God forgive me—what I never thought I could plan to do under any circumstances—to kill you! Then, I came to my senses. It was when I saw the red spot growing larger on the snow. That blot seemed to be in my brain. In that moment the Infinite spoke, and I heard. For five awful minutes I knew how Cain felt. Then I tried to forget;

but, when the darkness came and I was alone with my conscience, it all came back. It seemed the universe had turned sheriff to hunt me down. All I had felt of hate and bitterness gave way to self-condemnation. I despised, I loathed myself for a fool and a devil. All the wickedness of my life stared me in the face like a gorgon. I sweated blood, Jack; and I'm not ashamed to tell you—I prayed! I didn't know just how to get at it, but I did the best I could, and it seemed to count. But the condemnation is past, and the world seems altogether new. You see, Jack, I had a good mother, and she taught me how a man ought to live. Those things stick! When I needed her most she died. I went wild after that.

“When I saw *her*, I felt something prompt me to do better, and I did try in a selfish way. Then came the trip to the lake, and what happened there shook my confidence; at least, I tried to make myself believe it did. But I loved her, Jack, I loved her. I feel honored to say so. Who could keep from it? And I love her now; but all that is gone forever. Then came the worst—you had asked her to be your wife, and, from what I heard, I believed you had not been rejected. It was after that I determined to save her from a fatal mistake, and at the same time take the toll of my own misery. Don't

think hard of me, Jack; but I have stood under the pines and listened to your guitar till it seemed the very stars burned red in their sockets. It maddened me to hear her laughter, echoing down the slope, for I thought you were deceiving her. Now I can see I was a fool; we were both fools. What reason had I to think I could win her love? I am saying this, Harrington, because I want you to understand. I was not myself that day. But I am changed. I can not explain it; I do not understand it, but I think she would. Anyway, it's no more Bald Eagle for me."

"It heads me off, Borden," said Harrington, looking at his companion in a bewildered way.

Borden broke into the first carefree laughter he had known in months.

"Does it show on me, Jack? I tell you, the very trees look different. But I wronged you, and when I get to camp I will let the law take its course; that would be right."

Harrington felt for and pressed Borden's hand.

"And that's just the thing you won't do. Look at that hole; look at your swollen muscles! We'll call it square. I, too, was an idiot. What right did I, a dog salmon of the Seven Seas, have to think I could win that glorious creature, or climb into the same heaven with such a star?

Bah! so much for self-conceit. She never felt so much as a firefly spark of anything for me but the interest of a great-hearted woman for one who needed a flash of light to show him the way. We were fools, Borden; confound it, we were fools! Now, let us shake and call it even."

The hands of the men closed over each other, and the eyes of both were dim. Mastery had come to Borden at last. The old life dropped from him like an unclean garment, and peace spread itself upon his heart.

Suddenly the men remembered that they were hungry. Borden moved about to ease his cramped muscles. He was not wholly exhausted; the fresh air had restored him immediately; but when Harrington tried to get to his feet, he found that a sprained ankle made it impossible for him to walk. He staggered, and would have fallen, had not Borden caught him.

"The log squeezed my foot pretty hard, and I feel used up from bruises, but I'll make a try of it," said Jack, tenaciously.

Pale from pain, the debonair man struggled onward through the deep snow, but finally gave it up and sank exhausted.

"Can't do it, Borden," he said, with a smile. "Go on and leave me; I'll be all right."

"I'll never do that!" Borden replied emphatically. "I'll carry you."

"It's ten miles to camp, and the trail has not been broken, only what you did coming up. You can't do it."

"There's always something left in my body for a case of emergency. What I *have* to do I *can* do."

"But you can't," Harrington protested.

"Can't, man! I've got to, that's all! Do you suppose I'll leave you here to die? Get on my back."

Taking the belt and shoulder-straps from Harrington's pack, Borden made a loop, in which he placed the wounded man. Seated in the sag, with his head over Borden's shoulders, they began their battle with the snow. When night fell once more they had not ploughed their way through a mile of the stubborn element. Many packed places in that distance showed where Borden had rested with his burden.

Another cabin in the canyon offered shelter, and some flour and tea found in a box restored their waning strength. Then, kindling a fire, both men sank down and slept the sleep of weariness.

XXV

THE END OF THE TRAIL

BORDEN awoke to finding a blinding snow-storm raging. The outlook was most forbidding. Clouds of fine particles, which cut the face like a knife, swirled in blinding eddies across the vision. The storm was not over, and to remain where they were meant starvation. There was nothing to do but battle on.

Harrington's foot was much swollen, and his other injuries made it necessary that he get aid as soon as possible. Borden went out and faced the wind; it was bitter cold, and the snow stung like a serpent's tooth. He concluded to leave his companion in the cabin and go for help, but when he returned he found him muttering incoherently, and knew that fever had made him delirious. There was nothing for it but to struggle on, for there was no way to make the cabin secure as a prison.

No time was to be lost, for every hour the storm added to the depth of the snow, and nine miles stretched between them and the hospitality of the camp. As he looked out into the blinding

cloud, Borden realized fully the almost super-human task before him. Could he do it? that was the question. If it were not in his body, then they would perish together. It was the fruit of his own sin, and he might have to reap to the utmost.

Muttering, and flushed with fever, Harrington was forced into the straps, and the next minute they were in the crash of the wind, bearing down the mountain through the hip-deep element.

Fortunately, the windings of the trail could be seen through grove and thicket, so that Borden was sure of his way. Then, too, his passage up through the first fall of snow helped to lessen the toil and make it easier to follow the path.

Wild and far the wind swept the hissing cloud through the smothered forest. Nature spoke with an acrid, belligerent whine. The wolf packs of the gale were running high, their white fangs bared. Could anything live in such anarchy? Yet, there was heart-beat on the trail. Something that heaved and moaned and swung, right and left, slowly wallowing a trough through the leagues of measureless white. The shrill horses of the blast neighed on the ridges, and the mail of the ice crashed on the cliffs.

Borden realized that he was launched upon a venture where to fear was to die. If he hesitated, he would be sucked down by enveloping furies. In his extremity he asked help of Heaven. He was struggling through a seething vortex of howling malediction. He, a lone man, was matched against the storm; he was battling the universe. Why not sink down in the smother and die? That was what his overwrought nerves wanted him to do. But life, too, was assertive, and it mocked at death, bit viciously at his frayed energies, and drove him to further effort.

In the terrible congestion through which he moved, Borden felt the touch of something that was heartless; something that rode the blast like a fiend; it slashed the wilderness horribly. The sound in the forest was like a woman wailing for her dead.

Finally he seemed to lose all sense of time and distance; there was only the swish of cutting particles, and the muttering thing on his back—the thing that was crushing him to the earth. There were still miles of snow ahead, but the lessening of the depth told him that he had passed over half the way. His aching body was quick to note this. He ceased to think of the end of the trail, and moved from one object to another as points marking his progress.

Should he leave Harrington and go on alone? Never! They would reach safety together, or perish in the same drift. Side by side they would find their bones when the spring returned to weave them round with flowers.

Gradually Borden lost feeling in his stiffened limbs. That they were obeying the mandates of his will he knew, for he could see them plunging ahead turn by turn. Always there was the mastery over a few feet of the yielding element, but after that, endless measures of the same element to be subdued. The vastness of it was maddening. Finally, the burden on his shoulders seemed to be part of his own inert body. He marveled that he could move. But he was still able to send back his challenge to fiend and fury. When he could take no more steps, he would sink down and the fiends could have their moment to laugh, but he would laugh as well. It was a soul challenging time and immensity.

In the struggle his hat had been lost, and his hair was crusted with sleet and masses of ice. His steaming body was crusted in a creaking mail. Still, he was moving. He knew that because the objects on which he fixed his eye came gradually to meet him. That small tree was fifty yards ahead . . . after while it was beside him.

In this condition, Borden continued to obey the cosmic instinct to live. Against this was pitted the elemental fury of storm and wind and cold. Around him was the measureless vastness of the hills, wrapped in white death. Never before had he felt so utterly overmatched. He was so small, so weak, compared to the fetterless forces which assailed him. All was so merciless, so unfeeling. The trees, which he had always looked upon as his friends, seemed to consign him to the destruction which was crushing them. The overhanging rocks mocked him as he passed. All he saw or touched was turned to be his enemy.

Night fell early, adding to his desperate condition. The objects about him were obliterated in a nebulous blur. All day he had been facing the impossible; now his exhausted body began to call for rest in every fiber. He grew dizzy. There seemed little left but a center of reason, which instinctively forced him to further exertion. On his back was the same shuddering burden that had crushed him in the morning. The thought of death became a luxury. Were it not for that one spark within him which the storm could not quench he would stretch his stiffened hands to the grim monster and tell him to take his toll. But, no; that vital, dominant something would not give up. He must fight—

fight to the last gasp and the last snapped fiber. He ground his teeth in terrible exhaustion. Something that was like the old smile settled upon his chilled lips, and he went on. Determination, grim and unyielding, drove him to the effort which every step cost him.

In the darkness he fell against trees and into holes. From these accidents he rose, staggering and gasping. His breath had become a sob. In this manner he seemed to pass through cycles of torture. Staggering and blind, he began to groan his complaint through set teeth and swollen lips.

The hours went by, measures of misery. Borden could not keep any idea of time. There were little seasons of relief when he sank down to rest. Then came the reviving twinge in every fiber, as he staggered to his feet to begin again the maddening struggle with death.

Sometimes he grasped small trees and leaned forward to rest. Again, he sank upon some log over which he struggled. That he had covered considerable distance he knew, because the snow had decreased very much in depth.

Had Borden been struggling to save his own life, he would not have considered it worth the effort he was putting forth. But that muttering thing on his back . . . he must save it. After all, it was his own doings. This was the fruit

of the evil tree which he had planted, and he must eat it to the last bitter rind.

Once he turned, to find gray forms moving after him through the trough his body had made. Vaguely he knew them to be wolves, starved into facing the storm. Harrington always carried a revolver under his coat. He searched and found it, faced about, and, holding it in his stiffened hands, fired at three paces, once, twice, three times. The rest of the gray forms began the feast provided by his aim. An hour later he repeated the maneuver, and was troubled no more.

The wind rose. There was a louder complaint in the forest, and the darkness seemed to grow more tense. Borden leaned against a tree to rest. He dared not sit down, lest he be unable to rise with his burden. At that instant something wavered before his blurred vision. In the denseness it danced like a will-o'-the-wisp.

At first he thought the storm had broken and that he was watching a star. But on second thought he knew this could not be, for the slashing particles were as cruel as ever. Then he roused himself and peered toward the tiny point. It could only be that! The light of the Red Warrior mill; the camp was just under that speck. There was something left in him

which stirred to further action. He was moving again. Heavily he forced his feet into the mocking weariness before him.

Perhaps Harrington was dead! No. He made out the old shiver. The man was making a brave struggle for life. For the thousandth time Borden sank in the snow to rest. Could he ever get up? He doubted it. Why not give up? It would be best to die there and have it over. He had been a fool, anyway. Then came the recollection of his desire to kill, and that out of that had come all this suffering. He had poured his own glass with bitterness, and he would drain it to the lees.

Grim and set of jaw, he got to his feet. Now he was moving again, every breath a moan. His lips opened and closed with every heave of his lungs, and froth clogged them which was pink with blood. At this moment Borden felt the stir of the old spirit which had brought him the victory in a hundred fights. It had turned defeat into success when he was overmatched, and it saved him now. Where other men gave up, he began to fight the more desperately, and here, where an army of others would have yielded to the tempest, he girded himself for one more desperate effort.

Back to his cheeks came the old bite of the white teeth and the old choke of the whirling

clouds. The same tantalizing mockery clung to his aching feet. With a howl, the wind packs took up the hunt for his life, and all the fiends returned. Borden rose against them with unyielding determination. Nightmare and ruin went abroad on black wings. Now he was talking aloud of his sufferings. He realized by this that he was far gone. He laughed and went on.

How he reached it he never knew, but he suddenly found himself walking in a broken trail. The camp was just before him. The miners had been going and coming from their cabins that evening. Borden blessed them from his soul. The pack at his hips, the mockery at his feet, were gone; only remained the faintness and the deathlike exhaustion, and the squelch of the body on his back; also, a terrible nausea, as from the loss of blood.

How long he was staggering and plunging down the trail he could not tell. When he remembered clearly, he was grasping a porch post to keep from falling, and many men were about him. The crushing weight was gone from his shoulders, and familiar voices were speaking encouragement in his ears. The battle with storm and wind was over! Harrington's life was saved—the very life he had climbed the mountain to take.

No street fight or saloon fray ever stirred

the camp of Deadman as the appearance of Borden with his burden, crusted in snow and ice. With his hair matted and frozen in a mass, and his brows hanging with sleet, he had seemed to them as some arrival from the caverns of horror. His eyes had looked at them wildly, and he muttered through lips covered with froth. In a minute the saloons were empty, and hundreds of miners thronged about the strange pair.

"By the nine gods! If it ain't Borden and Jack Harrington!" bawled Burke. "What the devil does this mean?"

With one swing of his ponderous arms, Burke lifted the unconscious man from the straps, and ten minutes later Harrington was snug and warm in a bed. True to his nature, Borden refused aid in getting to his cabin. Calling for a cup of coffee, he gulped the delicious liquid, and then staggered up the trail, with the big-hearted Kelly close at his side. Once in the cabin, a pot of the same stimulant was set simmering, and elk steaks were soon frying in a skillet. Borden ate sparingly, and, throwing his soaked clothing from him, stretched himself on his bunk and sank into dreamless unconsciousness.

With the miner's belief in the virtues of liquor, Kelly had dashed into a saloon for a

flask of brandy; but Borden had savagely refused to drink it, and his partner had gone for the coffee, wondering at this strange action of his friend.

Seated near him, Kelly filtered broth through Borden's lips at intervals. Burke and Old Lucky came the next morning to see how he was, and found him in a sleep that was death-like in its profoundness.

XXVI

A LONELY CABIN

BORDEN slept on through two nights and a day. When he awoke, he found himself rested, but stiffened in every joint. He got up, dressed, and, with the appetite of a wolf, fell upon the food Kelly had prepared. His splendid body had responded immediately to nourishment, and he was soon well on the way to his old condition of superb strength and rugged vigor.

That night, when the snow had ceased to fall, and the great stars hung low in the steel-blue ether, Borden grew communicative and told Kelly all that had happened. Not the slightest detail was left out. Beginning at the first, he went through all the moods which had led to the last feverish one, in which he had planned to take life. Then came the recital of the terrible condemnation which followed his sin; the long struggle with the packed slide, and the battle with the snow.

Kelly listened intently, conscious of nothing so much as that there was indeed a great change

in his partner. Never before had he spoken this way of himself, or what he did. With open face, Borden confessed that he had looked up in his distress, and that peace had followed. Jim listened with open eyes. It had not been this way before. Deep in his heart he was glad—glad for Borden's sake, and his own, for he regretted what he had said before.

"Something's struck you, Bord; I don't know just what, but you're not like you were; and here's my hand, old pard, for luck. It does my Irish soul good to see you getting a new start. This sounds all right to me!" Kelly offered his hand across the table and Borden gripped it warmly.

"Does it show on me, Jim? I hope so, for I feel good inside. I made a botch of it before. I meant all right, but I was acting from selfishness, and, of course—failed. I never thought that my wickedness was against God. I wanted to do what *she* would approve, you see? But in this struggle I saw only the fearful sin of my life; the days and nights of wickedness. I tell you, Jim, that hole up there represents more than getting out of a snowslide. When I crawled out of it, I crept out of the old life into a new one. The Bald Eagle will see me no more! From this on I fight, not with men, but for them—understand?"

"I guess so," Jim replied, getting up to wash the dishes.

"Think I'll just step up the trail and tell her all about it, and what a fool I've been. She will understand it all, and I know she will be kind. Don't get a wrong notion, Jim; it's not like it was before. I'll prove that to you beyond back talk. But somehow I believe she would be glad to hear about it—just as a friend."

The time had come to test Borden. Kelly had waited for it from the moment his partner had told of his determinations.

"That will be impossible, Borden, for she is gone!" Jim looked straight into the eyes which seemed searching his very soul.

"Gone where?" The words were heavy with surprise and disappointment.

"East. Left after the first storm. They are on the railroad by this time. I didn't see Miss Truxton before she left; I was up at the mine; but she left a farewell for me with The Color. She didn't forget you, either, for she gave the girl this for me to hand to you."

Borden took the note and opened it with slow fingers. The bit of white seemed sacred. On it was written, in a delicate hand, a mere fragment:

"Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered

with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

Borden folded the paper very slowly, very deliberately, and placed it in his pocket.

"It's all Greek to me. I tried to make it out, but gave it up." Kelly shook his head doubtfully. "Guess I'm thick. How does it strike you?"

"I understand it," Borden replied, looking out over the dazzling white, reaching endlessly on over the world. After a time he turned to Jim.

"When is she coming back?"

"Don't know. Perhaps never. Think they've left for good. The Queen went with them. I understand she has folks back there. I asked The Color about it, and it seems that Miss Truxton said nothing of ever returning to the hills. Lucky says the superintendent has closed up his business, and will not need to come back. But all this has nothing to do with what you told me, Borden," Jim added decidedly, wishing to test his partner.

"It won't," said Borden, dropping into a seat by the window.

"I'm going down and tell Jack you are all right. He has sent up a couple of times asking about you. Says there ain't such a man above ground as you, and not one worthy even to strike drill for you. Get that? I think of

punching his head for the reflection. Behave yourself till I get back."

Jim slid into his coat and went down the trail with something in his stride that was unusual.

Left alone, Borden sat for some time thinking. After all, there seemed little left in the hills since Gene Truxton had gone. With cleared vision he saw her worth, and knew that he loved her with all his nature. Purified seven times by the furnace through which he had passed, nothing remained now but the clear, clean passion which exalted him. And that love never could change! Time might pass; the gray might come to his temples; age dim his glance and bow his frame; but the love he felt for Gene Truxton would always shine like opal fire at the core of his being. That face, with its warm, clean beauty, framed in a spraying cloud of wind-blown hair, must ever bend above the mercy-seat of his heart. Those deep eyes, with their wavering, dreamy wonder, would be to him as stars very clear and pure.

A hunger came to Borden's heart; something that mellowed and made for a love of right. Obeying an impulse, he went up the trail. The snow lay deep on each side. The young hemlocks stood smothered in the piled whiteness. Each slender pyramid seemed touched with the

pensive sadness which lay upon his own soul.

At the door of the cabin he stood looking at the mark in the drift caused by swinging it forth and back as the snow fell. A later fall had partly filled the groove, accentuating the loneliness and emptiness of the place.

He entered almost reverently, and stood with uncovered head in the center of the room. The stove shone with a perfect polish, and the rough floor was not marred by a single stain. There were some pictures on the walls she had put up to relieve their barren appearance. The chairs stood about as if waiting to receive the familiar forms. At the window a dead vine still clung to a string by which she had led it in a lost June. The spell of her personality was in the place. All was sacred because of it. He could have touched every object with his lips. Something very tender played like sunshine around his heart. He had seen her on the other side of the table, cool and clean, her head crowning the fair neck like a queen's. With all this there had been a natural humility born of a deeply spiritual nature. Drawing a chair to the opposite side, he sat down, while he tried to imagine her as she looked that day.

As he called up the wavering image, a flood of feeling passed over him and his eyes became dim. Stretching his hands across the

table, he cried out of the fullness of his soul:

"Oh, Gene, Gene! The months and years will be long without you! God help me!"

For a long time he sat, trying to adjust himself to the emptiness which encompassed him. Wearily he bowed his face upon his arms, and remained in position for a long time. A touch recalled him, and, looking up, he saw Jim bending over him, a light in his eyes that was good.

"Come back to the cabin, old fellow, and remember, I understand. I wish it might have all been different."

As Borden stood up, the Irishman's hand slid into his with a sympathetic pressure; then they went down the trail together.

XXVII

THE MOTTO AT THE MINERS' REST

THAT night, Borden and Kelly talked frankly, as men with great decisions upon them.

In the glow of his vision, Borden spoke seriously of the dark side of Deadman. There was scarlet excess; the saloons were wallows; the dance-halls flamed with wickedness; the drunkenness was a stew to be despised. There was plenty of crime, too, for the graveyard had new boards to mark the places where men were buried who had gone down gun in hand.

As a man who reviews himself in his own death-chamber, Borden went over the black catalogue, holding himself responsible for a large share of it. Men he had started on the swift current which sweeps out to a shoreless sea had crashed on the rocks, and had gone down. With these he put another list—those who were still afloat. These would join their comrades under the drifts soon, if something was not done. The whirlpools were already sucking them down, and they would be gone if some one did not lend a hand.

Jim listened intently, but said little. Later, when Borden lay full length on his bed, his eyes turned to the window, through which he could see the stars spilling down the vast sky spaces, he felt Jim near him. Borden turned toward him and waited.

"I say, Bord, we've been up the trail together," he began. "We've taken a full course in the college of Hard Knocks, sure as you live. Mind when we starved a week over on the Grizzly Bear? And the time we ate our leggins down Ophir way? Then, I take it you hain't forgotten the time we tramped it, bed and picks, from Silver City to Ruby Gulch, with nothing to eat but jack-rabbits and flour. Well, I've been thinking of these things while you were talking. Remember when you nursed me in the lone cabin on the Rattlesnake when I had spotted fever? Now, these things are what make partners stick together, and I'm going to stick to you. Get me? I see that something has struck you, good and hard. I don't just know what it is, but you're hit, and hit square, and I'm mighty glad of it. Stay with it! Do you hear? Stay with it!"

Borden would have spoken, but Kelly turned on him abruptly.

"Shut up!" he thundered. "What I was going to say before you interrupted me was this: It wouldn't hurt Jim Kelly to stop long

enough to see if he is winning or losing in the game, and here's my hand, old pard, that I'll go along with you, as far as I know how, so long as you keep your stakes up on this claim. The Color thinks I ought to cut the old pace out, and I guess she's about right."

Without a word, Borden gripped the hand held toward him with both of his, and the compact was sealed. Ten minutes later, Kelly's heavy breathing told that he had laid aside all serious thoughts till morning.

For some time Borden lay looking out on the winter night. His thoughts were of the girl who had influenced his life so vitally. She had come into it like a fair angel, sat for a time under the wild upas which cast its shadow over his life, and departed. With the hunger which men's hearts sometimes know he wished for her. But she could not come to him. Would his eyes ever again look into hers? Oppressed beyond measure with the thought of his loss, he fell into a profound sleep till morning.

Borden rose, and, after an hour's chat with Kelly, who seemed unusually cheerful, he walked down to the Miners' Rest, where Laughing Brookie was putting his dog through a series of new tricks, to the great amusement of some newcomers who had arrived in camp the night before. The old man greeted him with great

good will, and launched into a laughing eulogy on the merits and influence of the place, maintaining his character by haw-hawing between statements.

Bringing out an old ledger, he showed Borden a crude record of those who had attended, and the number of letters written from the tables.

"She sure hit the right idea when she opened up this shack," the old man chuckled. "There's a lot of us old chaps who are tired of the Bald Eagle sort of existence, and we enjoy the change. Sure, we get a dry tongue for whisky now and then; that is, I know I do, and the others are about the same; but there's that drinkin'-spout, and a gulp or so helps out so a fellar can stand it. The only reason I didn't get at this thing before was because there wasn't no place to go but to the Moose Head and the Bald Eagle, and when you git in there you know what comes next. There'd be Old Lucky, pickled in the poison thirty years ago, and Sluicy, with the rest of the bar-flies, hangin' around for a drink. Well, the next Brookie'd know he wouldn't know anything; that's why I told her there ought to be some place where a man could slide in without seein' a barkeep or a bottle. Why, hang it all, man! I've seen letters twisted in the very shine of the glasses; yes, sir, and

they spelled out, 'Come and drink'; and Brookie allus done just that—"

"You are right," Borden interrupted. "I see a good many things now I never stumbled onto before." The old man stared at his companion without understanding, then continued: "Things is different with Brookie since she come. Ain't she the blessedest angel that ever lived? And here she's clean gone for good. Far as I can find out, she don't calcalate to come back. Showed up here one day and said, 'So-long,' and that ended it. Seems the old lady got homesick, so they went out after the first breakin' of the road."

"And she didn't say when she was coming back?" Borden asked, in what appeared to be slight interest.

"No-o-o, she didn't. Said her dad's business was fixed up all around, and that he could go. I axed The Color about it t'other day, and she said they calcalated to travel South this winter and spring, then go somewhere else. That's all I know. Fact is, she's too good for this sort of life, and for her sake I was glad to see her go. But, there wa'n't nothin' proud about her. Why, confound it, man, look at an old loafer like me! And yet she'd come down here and treat me like I was related to her, and was her kin. Look at me, I say! Came right in and

nussed me back to life, and then trusted me; that's it, trusted me, and gave me charge o' this place. God A'mighty bless her for all that!" Brookie laughed, while he dug an ancient bandana into each eye to obliterate all traces of sentiment.

Borden was interested. Any reference to Gene Truxton was like music in his ears. Though he told himself that she never could be his, that they had met for the last time, yet this talk about her brought a sweet hunger to his heart. When he asked himself how he could pass the voiceless years without her, there was no answer, and he asked help from whence his peace and change had come.

"I tell you, Borden, this place is a mighty fine thing. Why, the boys come down here every night and play checkers and swap yarns; and it keeps a lot o' them from getting the Bald Eagle fever and spendin' what ought to go to their families. There's been a many a chap in here who'd not wrote home for months, and when he'd see the writin' stuff there, why, down he'd go, and off'd go a letter on the fust stage, and, like as not, some money in it. But the place ain't big enough, that's the trouble. There's a lot o' things that ought-a be done, and if they was we'd run the saloons a mighty close heat for first place."

"What are they?" Borden dropped into a chair and drew a slip of paper toward him. "You see, Brookie, I have something more than I need to live on, and, if the place needs fixing up a bit, we will, that's all."

Brookie laughed excessively. "Well, now, Borden, it's jest like ye to do that for us old grizzlies, and we appreciate it; for, mind ye, young fellar, I ain't allus been an old bum like I am now. I ust to go to meetin' with my old mother, and I can see her hands a-layin' in her lap, with somethin' on her face that made me think o' God. I reckon ye never thought that I didn't tech liquor till after I was twenty-past? You see, it might all a-been different if it hadn't a-been for what happened twixt Mary—and—me. Just a misunderstandin', with a nose or two put in where they had no business, and our little dream run out.

"But I liked her, Borden, I did, and she liked me, for I wa'n't an old soak them days. Mother ust to say I was a handsome chap, but you know how mothers is. Mary didn't understand, and I was a hot-headed fool, and that ruined everything. I went away for three years, and when I got better notions and went back, Mary was dead. Then I didn't care; just went bad and—here I am. Didn't intend to tell ye this. I ax your pardon. It's just

a little from an old man's life. Let it go."

Brookie sat looking out of the window on the snow-piled mountains, a reminiscent light on his face, and Borden, gazing upon him, saw what made him feel a deep sense of comradeship for the old man, for he, too, had suffered; he, too, had been a fool.

"But we must talk about what is needed here," Borden remarked, and the old man recalled himself with a laugh.

"I'll name over a few things and you can put 'em down. First, it ought to be twict as big as it is. Lots o' the boys go away because there ain't chairs for them. Then, there's a lot o' chaps who want a place to spread their blankets; so it strikes me that about fifty places for bunks, and a hundred chairs, with a big room on this side, is about what is wanted. Then, we need a safe, where the boys could put their belongings. That would keep the saloons from gittin' what ought to go East to wives and children. What I want is to git these things in here ahead of the Bald Eagle stew. I can't think of any more now."

While Brookie was speaking, Borden was thinking fast. In the vision which had opened to him, he saw a splendid opportunity for the enlargement of Gene Truxton's idea on a scale that would dominate the camp, and swing its

moral tone to a higher level. A great field of service had opened, and with largeness of heart he entered it with a vim.

"I will work it out, Brookie," he said, rising. "But first the place must have a motto."

Two days later, Borden was leaning over one of the tables at the Miners' Rest, trying to explain a puzzling passage to Brookie and Old Lucky. It was the motto of the place, and it read:

"Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

XXVIII

FOLLOWING THE STAR

DEADMAN awoke to the fact that something out of the ordinary was happening in it.

Lumber was fished from under mountains of snow, and sent to the Miners' Rest on sleds. A force of men began to fashion this into ample wings to the old log building. On one side a long hall was built and partitioned into comfortable rooms. At the back, Borden put bathing facilities, and on the other side a gymnasium. Boxing was to be allowed under strict rules. Lifting-weights of all sizes were prepared. More tables were brought in, with an ample number of chairs. A safe was found which would answer the purpose. Horizontal bars were erected. Mats were put in for wrestling. On one side of the room was a sawdust pit for pitching weights. This hall, or room, was large and comfortable. Stoves were placed at each end.

When it was complete, Borden brought together the musicians of the camp and formed them into a string band. This would help hold

the feverish crowd. But that which proved the greatest delight was a Cornish quartet.

The plan was a success from the first, and this beyond Borden's most sanguine expectations. Within three weeks the saloon-keepers began to feel the drain, and the dance-halls grew less noisy. Those who had hailed Borden as a royal fellow, a knight of Vagabondia, now spoke of him as a meddler in other men's business. Many who had been glib of tongue ceased to be cordial, and the gamblers clicked their chips at the tables with empty chairs around them. Brookie overworked his dog that he might help hold the interest.

The bunks were always full, and there was a ceaseless splash in the bathtubs. Men strode in at all hours to write letters, and talk over the events of the day, usually the latest strike in some of the tunnels or a fight in one of the saloons. The great stoves roared their welcome, crammed with spruce wood, and Brookie laughed with boundless satisfaction.

At night men wrestled, pitched the weight, boxed, or listened to lusty male voices launched on songs full of the sentiment of home and life's highest hopes. There was one obligation asked of those who cared to enjoy the Miners' Rest, which was that they would agree to keep out of the saloons. But this was required of them only

after sufficient time had passed for the influence of the better conditions to work. Borden had feared that this might prove a drawback to the success of the venture, but found that those who were unwilling to comply with it were very few. They had felt the need of such a place, and there, under the lights, having part in games and good-natured feats of physical emulation, they learned that they were by nature non-alcoholic.

Borden stimulated a pride in the institution among them, and saw its fruits. As the long winter wore away, the crowds continued to come, and plans for a second enlargement were formed and carried out. The safe was always full of the earnings of the miners, who formed habits of saving, or sent their earnings to those dependent upon them back home. The different bars of the camp felt the falling off, and maledictions, brutal and deep, were heaped on Borden's head, as well as the girl who had conceived this scheme for the miners.

By common consent, Borden took the lead in all these gatherings. He was fitted for this, both by physical strength and leadership, to say nothing of that right which is recognized as going with money invested. To him men came with disputes over claims, or the divisions of outfits. In time, the miners began to feel the

place was theirs by right of donation, and they went out to talk for it, in the tunnels and in the cabins.

"It's a thousand miles ahead of any neck-scorchin', liver-rottin' saloon in this camp; and, as for Borden, he can whip you in a half a minute, and I can do it in a whole one, so shut your yap!" a miner had said to his companion in the stopes, when that individual had referred to the Rest as a petticoat institution and Borden as a granny.

When told of these things, Borden passed them off with a laugh. Afterwards, he usually found a chance to see the critics and invite them in person. Many came, were delighted, and stayed. But nothing gave him a greater hold on the men than the care of the sick. Taken with liver disorders and fevers common to heavy eaters and the mountain air, he nursed them with the tenderness of a woman; and every man who felt his touch at the bunk-side got up to be his loyal friend through every report. Many a sufferer he brought back from the shadowy valley which his feet were entering. When they were out of danger, he wrote letters for them, and, when they were "short," gave them money to send to needy families. Some were taken out on the slope, under the pines, and while the wind sang a funeral hymn

among the icy branches he put them away, and marked the place with a board. The missionary had gone East for the winter, and such tasks fell naturally to Borden. A born leader, he went among the men, holding them by an unconscious power, and inspiring them to self-respect by his own example. Seated by the bunk, or in the tunnel, he spoke words for men in a man's way. Among those whom his influence reached was Burke. Worn down with long debauch, the giant lay at the edge of the unknown, battling for weeks the swarming demons which tormented him.

When the danger was past, and he could understand, Borden sat with the great hand in his and spoke words that were barbed—words which held in the soul of the gorilla.

Kelly had kept strictly to the vow he made to Borden, and The Color was delighted. The cabin of old Sluicy took on a neatness it never had known before, and the girl sang the day in and out. Gene had given her the piano, and over its keys she toiled with a devotion that did credit both to teacher and pupil. Jim never tired of talking about the change in the girl, and Borden, who loved—though now he never spoke it—the name of the one who had wrought this transformation, listened without comment, a great hunger in his eyes.

The big-hearted Irishman understood, and would repeat over and over the things Gene had written to The Color, but always there was missing the one thing for which Borden longed and waited—waited with no reason to expect it. There were details of trips by water and land, with shopping excursions in the big Eastern cities, but never a word about returning to the mountains.

That winter, Brookie was thrown into a spasm of excitement by the reception of a letter from Gene, inquiring about the Miners' Rest, and himself personally. She had asked him to remember her to all who were interested in the institution. From man to man, Brookie went with his treasure. While they ran through it to please him, the old man would wax eloquent on the character of the writer.

"I tell ye, chaps, she's the blessedest angel ever bornd, and what she done for us old loafers proves it. There's some as calls her 'Nugget,' but I say she's an angel—'The Angel O' Deadman.'"

The letter contained the information that several boxes of books were on the way. These were to be put in the Rest. The answer was written entirely by Brookie, under a cross-fire of jokes from the "old timers," chief of which was Lucky. It is hardly necessary to say that

Kelly, who sat near to prompt, saw that two pages were filled with statements regarding Borden and what he was doing. There was a brief account of the snowslide experience and the long battle afterwards to get Harrington to camp. The Irishman knew this would be all the evidence needed of a change in his partner. There was more about what Borden was doing for the men of the camp. After an account of the latest and best tricks he had taught his dog, Brookie closed with an urgent request that she come back. The letter was duly sealed and addressed to a post-office down Boston way, with a demand in the corner that it be returned to Laughing Brookie, of Deadman, if not received.

That night Borden and Kelly sat before the blazing fireplace, while Jim outlined the letter.

"You shouldn't have done it, Jim. It won't interest her, for she will think it is like the other time I reformed," Borden protested.

From talking contemptuously of the Miners' Rest, the saloon-keepers came to look upon the place as a dangerous institution, and one that was keeping much money from their tills, at the same time creating a strong sentiment against them. Bitterness grew apace. Secret meetings were held, which were reported promptly to Borden by the Ruby Kid, who had a way of

learning all that was going on. Many of the big spenders had practically dropped out, among them Jack Harrington, who reveled in the sports and books of the Rest. When questioned about the scar near his temple, he was in the habit of turning down the questioner with a laugh and the statement that scars generally went with snowslides.

Old Lucky held out stoutly against becoming an active member of the Miners' Rest. He prized his liberty, and he refused to sign it away. Besides, he'd only bring disgrace, for he had to have his "nip." However, Borden, who was watching his old friend, knew that he spent much more time at the Rest than at the saloons.

But if Borden watched Lucky, that individual as closely watched him. Sauntering into the place one night, the old man drew a chair up close to Brookie, and, indicating Borden with a jab of his thumb, expressed himself seriously, a thing quite uncommon to him.

"I tell you, Brookie, there's somethin' hit that lad. He don't look the same as he did down Bald Eagle way. He always was a model for good looks, but, hang me! I never see such a face as he has now. Looks like he'd seen God—and I think he has. None of that softness which makes the missionary such a yap,

but a look to him that makes one think of a Greek model—I used to know about them things, you understand. Well, I'm mighty glad this thing that has hit him didn't take the blaze out of his eyes, nor that old, dangerous grin from his mouth, though I don't think he'll be hunting trouble any more.

“But that ain't what I wanted to talk about. What he's doin' ain't pleasin' the barkeeps any too well, and I have a notion that they'll be plannin' some devilment before long. Just keep an eye on 'em, Brookie, and don't let 'em catch you noddin', that's all.” Lucky sauntered over to Borden and repeated the warning; then he went out into the glittering night.

The star was leading kindly and clearly, and Borden set his purpose to follow its light. Quietly he worked out his plans, and when the time came communicated them to a few whom he could trust. Among these were Burke and Jack Harrington. When the giant heard the plan, he swore first, then laughed, slapped his thigh, and declared himself ready for the fun. Jack was enthusiastic. It could be done, and it would be!

With the enlarged features of the Rest, there had come an increasing attendance of the miners. Among the younger men there was a growing rivalry for clean living. The physical

contests demanded it, and many cast off the chains of habit that they might gain increased powers of lung and thigh. In this manner the weeks went by, and the time came for the sun to return with a kindly face, shining over the good, brown earth.

XXIX

THE CALL

THE winter was gone. The singing of birds had come, with grass and a tender wind. The land was caught in a net of white waters, and the old sorrow came back to the pines.

Borden walked on slowly, following the trail as it led through breathing laurel and trembling aspen groves.

His mind was full of pensive thoughts, and quite in harmony with the mystery which touched him out of measureless distance. The old cosmic longing was abroad. Under the harmony and the beauty it spoke a weird language, baffling all efforts to fathom its strange secret. From passing clouds it signaled like farewells of departing ships—a vague, indefinite something which brought to his heart a pleasant pain. It was as a kiss not just given; an embrace felt, but not real; a wondrous breast, maddening in its burning mystery, yet never quite receiving the throbbing temple; something that smiled while it wept, always looking through soft, submissive tears.

The old hunger for Gene Truxton was eating at his heart. It was over forever, he knew. All that was left to him was the memory of a face like the pure shining of stars. It had been a trick of fate, a mockery. The love that would have been a heaven to him was reserved for another. Perhaps now her eyes were shining with the light which comes but once, and her lips were answering vow with vow. It was all a mystery; there never could come an answer. The years would pass, and in time his temples would grow their harvest of frost, and his step would be less strong; but never could the sacred flame which burned upon the altar of his heart die out.

He had not been weak, and he would not be. He had gone on, pouring the cool fountains of resignation on the hot tables of his heart, but the burning had remained. To-day he seemed overburdened. The wish at the core of him was great. He entered a small grove where the aspens and the glorified cherry mingled in scented profusion.

He stood for some time at the center, his head uncovered, his eyes raised to where the earth and sky met. At that mystic line he always had imagined that a tantalizing personality rested, half hidden in the filmy haze. Farther on was the great world of the Beyond

and the back of Beyond. Slowly all the hunger he had felt awoke in him, and the longing which had eaten his peace away rose dominant and resistless. Stretching his hands toward the charmed line, he cried passionately, once, twice: "Oh, Gene! Gene!"

On waves lighter than air the call went into the vastness which stretched between the woman he loved and himself. For a moment he stood as if listening, his face raised, his hands outstretched, as if waiting an audible reply. Then, with a quick intake of breath, he started as though a wing had touched his brow. Something of the ache in his heart ceased, and a sense of rest possessed him. For some time he stood caught in a mesh of the supernatural, while from far away came the smell of greasewood, blown from verdant hills.

The old spell came to him from the peaks, and he turned that way. The mountains were robed in green, varying from a deep emerald to a fading, filmy smear. The white waters were dancing in the valleys, their courses marked with the airy grace of willows. The deer were turning red in the thickets, and the grouse led their sweet-voiced broods through the bunch grass.

Borden had benefited by clean living. His veins bubbled with virility, and his eyes were

clear with pure thinking. Those who knew him best noticed that the wild laughter was gone; also, the stormy element which made him love a fight. But a smile which was far better seemed never absent from his lips. There was that about him which spoke of struggles, and of victories won. Now that the mirth of the land had come, he spent much of his time wandering through the scenes he loved. He enjoyed watching the white waters go flashing past, as if to keep some important tryst by coral isle or palmy bay. Perhaps they hurried that they might kiss the ship which bore the woman he loved farther from him. It was possible that her eyes might bend over these very waves, not knowing that he had looked upon them. Such is fancy when her wings are touched with the sober tints of regret.

Only once does a great love come to man or woman. Such a love had come to the soul of Paul Borden, and it never would cease to dominate him. Deep in the forest, he gave himself to dreams—dreams which left their impression on his face and soul.

The day passed, and came the twilight. Stretched on a bank, blue with gentian flowers, Borden watched the first stars appear, while the low murmur of the river, rushing on bright wheels to the sea, came to his ears. He almost

longed to mount its silver chariot, and count all its shining strands.

At last he rose and walked on. The moon was a spirit ship, sailing her imperial highway with flashing spars.

There are some moments into which all that ever has been felt of love or pain seems to be condensed. This was such an hour to Borden. A hundred times he put the haunting face from him, and tore the clinging image from his heart, only to find that he must do it over again. He longed for her wildly. The unappeasable hunger in his nature could be satisfied by one thing only—her love! and that never could be his.

He was strangely awake to his surroundings. The earth smells were good. There was something plaintive in the hooting of an owl. The wild was vitalized with a flowing spirit. He felt it and drank of it deeply.

Following an impulse, he walked rapidly out of the woods, and, reaching a path, followed it down the slope to where it crossed a small stream. Beyond was a stretch of laurel and mountain cherry. Through this he went with purposeful steps. Farther on, the trail ran along a winding ridge, where the tall hemlocks stood like sentinels above the town. He was on his way to the cabin of old Sluicy. Crossing the main

creek, he approached the hut, the measures of a song coming to him as he drew near. The Color was singing, and accompanying herself on the piano. Borden paused a moment to listen to the artless tune, then hurried on. Well he knew where the girl's voice had caught its pleasing note. There was something like it in the song Jim was singing as he came past the cabin. It only aggravated his own heart hunger.

The Color gave him a joyous greeting. The chivalry of man was a sacred tradition with this girl, and to that hour nothing had ever come to her to shake her faith in her creed. She drew him in with impulsive kindness, and insisted that he take the best chair in the house. Mrs. Sluicy limped in for a word, her hands dripping with dish-water. Borden pleaded haste, took the girl by the hand and led her out on the porch. Both sat down on the edge of it. It was more pleasant here, he insisted.

He wondered how he was to ask what he felt in his heart, but, as if she had divined his thoughts, The Color began at once to tell him of a letter she had just received from Gene Truxton. Borden appeared only passingly interested to the girl, who watched him narrowly as she talked. Miss Truxton had spent the winter traveling. The Queen was with her own people. There was a trip planned abroad, which would

include France and the English Isles. The proposition was something of a trial to her father and Aunt Ruth, but she believed they would consent in time. The letter was not long. There was some good advice to the girl, a personal note to Laughing Brookie, and the promise of a present soon. But Borden listened in vain for any reference to himself, or that the charm of the hills was calling her back.

She was not married, that was evident; but Borden wondered if the trip abroad might not include many unstated things. She mentioned seeing the missionary in an Eastern city, and spoke of him pleasantly. Evidently he had taken pains to hunt her up, and, from certain matters tucked in that easily riffled nook, "between the lines," Borden guessed that he had urged upon her the high honors of returning with him as a fellow-missionary to the heathen of Deadman. However, he came back without her. The missionary had brought the discouraging news that Aunt Ruth utterly refused to return to the hills, and that Gene spent much of her time in an effort to make the dear, but badly spoiled, old lady comfortable.

The Color stated this with genuine regret, for she had hoped all along that, with the coming of spring, the hills would draw back the one who had done so much for her.

Borden went down the trail with bowed head. There had been no reason to ask the question which had formed itself in his mind; The Color had answered that for him. Crossing the swinging bridge, he went on into the belt of fir woods beyond. A half-defined resolution formed itself in his mind to find her and tell her all. If she could not give what he craved, it would be easier to bear the load afterwards. The next instant he had dismissed the thought from his mind. She must have known how he felt in those days when his love was controlled by selfishness and jealousy, and she had not cared to give him reason to hope. Besides, he had been a fool, and had done those things which doubtless had completely alienated her affection, if she ever had any.

If there had been references to him in the letters which came to The Color, he would have taken courage; but there were none. True, she had expressed pleasure to hear of the good work he was doing in the camp, but in such language as made any approach impossible. No, it could not be. Fate had willed it otherwise, and, gathering his sacred sorrow back to his heart, he set his face like a flint, and walked resolutely out of the woods, as men go to prison. There was much to be done for others, and he would lose himself in that.

XXX

THE PLANS OF EVIL

BIG strikes in the mines insured a permanent population for Deadman.

The Miners' Rest was crowded day and night. The safe was filled to its capacity with gold dust and coin, and the married men came regularly to draw amounts to send East to their families. Instead of going to the saloons, the miners came to match each other in game and lift, or to listen to the singers from the boarding-house at the Red Warrior mine. A rollicking spirit prevailed, and many an ill humor was laughed out of court promptly.

Borden watched this with pleasure, mingled with the men, and shared in the games and contests. His own disposition was extremely sociable, and he entered into everything in a way that made him the life of the place. He was still planning quietly. The hour was near at hand when he would strike, and strike hard!

Some of Pierre's followers had come back, and were frequenting the camp. This was not good for his plans, and Borden worked that

much harder. Later, the Frenchman himself came. He had been assured secretly of Borden's change of living, and, hoping that those who had planned his hurt had forgotten it, or had gone to new fields, he crept about the town watchful and armed.

Borden was not deceived. He knew the villain was supported and encouraged secretly by the saloon men, and that the murderer would be used as a tool to work harm to the Miners' Rest. He said little, but those who watched him saw that he was sleeping close to the safe, a rifle beside him.

The time had come for Lucky to play his part, and he went about it in his own way. A few nights later, the old prospector took Borden aside and reported a secret meeting of the gamblers, saloon-keepers, and several members of Pierre's gang, Pierre himself being present.

"The devil's to pay, Borden," the old man began. "That vermin has come back. I heard it all. I was where I could. Remember, I've slept off many a drunk in that back room—only this time I wasn't drunk. With only a partition between us, I heard all their schemes."

"What are they planning to do, Lucky?" Borden asked.

"Why, blow up the Miners' Rest with dynamite, and rob the safe! The Frenchman is to

do that first, then they are to divide the haul and send you where you will do them no more harm—understand?”

Borden nodded. “When is this to happen?”

“At moonrise, day after to-morrow night; remember, when the moon rises. They are going to set an old cabin on fire at the upper end of town, and while the miners are up there they will do their work.” Lucky saw the old, dangerous smile come to Borden’s lips. “Thank God, he hain’t lost that!” the old man mused.

“So, that’s the trick, is it? Well, just leave it to me, and I’ll try to have a surprise ready for them; meantime, say nothing to any one about what you have heard.”

“Sure, boy. But, remember, I’m on whatever turns up. I want a chance to pinch that rascal’s neck.” The old man’s hands opened and closed convulsively, as if the feel of the Frenchman’s flesh was in them. “Before I go, I think I’ll have you put me on the active list down here. A gang that’ll plan the likes of this is no bunch for me.”

The old miner leaned over the table and watched Borden put his name in the book in a clear, strong hand, then, with an expression of satisfaction, he shuffled out, tightening the belt at his hips as he went.

XXXI

THE SURPRISE

BORDEN communicated what he had heard to a few—perhaps a dozen. He planned to thwart the schemes of his enemies in the most effective way. He smiled grimly as he thought that the very men who once hailed him a good fellow and a royal knight of Bacchus were now planning to take his life. He had been a fool among fools. That was painfully clear to him. But those days were gone, never to return. He saw himself moving through the filthy atmosphere of the Bald Eagle as some one he might read of in a book. That old self was dead—buried forever. With a feeling of disgust, he shook the memory from him. Thank God! the old life with its gangrene was gone.

Burke, Kelly, Lucky, and a few others who could be trusted, were taken into the secret. All entered heartily into Borden's plans. It was arranged that these, when the alarm of fire was given, should drop back and take stations on all sides of the Miners' Rest. Once there, they were to await the instructions of their leader.

The night of the third day came, and as the hour approached, Borden walked quietly among the miners in the great hall, and saw that all those to whom he had spoken were there. Standing under the great pine near the door, Borden watched the silver caps grow on the hills as the moon rose beyond the range. At last the night was bridged with a glittering span; then the golden cusp of the moon appeared above the eastern summit, filling the valley to the brim with its white effulgence.

What an incongruity that evil men should select such an hour for robbery and murder. A mighty grieving began in the pines as the light wind came down from the hills. The branches seemed filled with premonitions. The hour had come, and he awaited the stroke of sin.

A sense of peace was upon him. Juries of nature had tried and acquitted him of weakness. Planet judges had pronounced him strong. God had said he was clean. The wealth of it was delicious. In his loneliness, he had made the Queen of the Wild his companion, and she had crowned him, and given him seat with her on her emerald throne. Together they had gone gipsying down all the lanes of harmony, where Beauty and Mystery took his hands and kissed them.

From a cliff on the point of the hill came the

hooting of an owl, a trifle too vigorous for that somber bird. Borden turned at the sound, the old smile on his lips. A moment later the northern sky was tinted with a delicate carnation, and with it a far shout which reached him in a broken chain of echoes. A nearer voice took up the cry, and the camp echoed to the magic clarion of "Fire! Fire!" A man leaped out of a clump of young trees and ran past the Rest, shouting the alarm. Instantly the doors were thrown open and the miners began to pour out, and, seeing the glare, stampeded up the street. In the rush of the crowd a dozen men dropped out and slipped unseen to their stations.

When the sound of the running had died away, a slinking form crept from the laurel, and with a catlike motion approached the house, keeping well within the shadows. The figure passed to the rear of the building, while Borden entered by a side door. At his heels was Old Lucky. Inside, both men removed their shoes and stepped into one of the booths. The safe, half hidden in shadow, was not ten feet from them. The next instant, light steps on the floor told the watchers that some one was approaching from the rear. The sound ceased, and Borden, peering through an opening, saw the Frenchman crouched in a listening attitude.

Convinced that the place was deserted, the

villain turned toward the safe, an evil grin on his face. Deftly he tried the lock. It was evident that he was no novice in such matters. As by magic, the bolts obeyed him, and the heavy door swung upon its hinges. At this moment the watchers moved out from their hiding-place. Startled by a slight sound, the Frenchman turned his head and saw Borden within a few feet of him. With the agility of a panther, the thief leaped to his feet. As he reached his full height, his hand going in a lightning sweep to his hip, a blow from Borden's full right arm crumpled him on the floor. The next instant the hand of Old Lucky closed like a vise on his throat.

It was only the work of an instant to bind and gag the quaking villain. Outside, Borden found that the other parties to the plot were in the hands of his men. All were badly frightened, and begged to be protected. Though they had deliberately hired themselves to take his life, each man asked Borden to plead for him. The anger of Old Lucky knew no bounds at this.

"A mess of cold-blooded murderers askin' the man they planned to kill, for mercy! Think of that! There's nothin' in hell or out of it as low as you fellows. What mercy would you a-showed Borden if things had gone your way?

Any one of you devils would have laughed to cut his throat, and glad of the chance. No, sir! You hang! is my verdict, and I'll furnish a rope—got it right here handy." Sure enough, Lucky brought a rope from the place where he had hidden it.

Burke and several others were of the same opinion. Against this feeling Borden spoke quietly, but firmly. The Ruby Kid, who had a way of turning up in unexpected places, was sent to call the miners back. They came, shouting their rage, for the Kid had told them of the plot. Two hundred strong they packed about the conspirators, demanding rope trial, and that by quick jury.

When a move was made to drag them to the pine-tree at the front, Borden stepped before the leaders and raised his hand.

"Hear Borden!" "Hear Borden!" came from all sides.

Standing upon a boulder, he set the case before them. By every law he should have the deciding voice, but there were judges in the land to whom such things should be submitted. If they wished to please him, they would do this. Then, raising his voice to a convincing pitch, he asked that they would hear him out on the following Thursday evening in the great hall at the Rest. If they did, he

had something to submit to them worth while. As for the men they had captured, turn them over to the law.

This was agreed to by a majority, and Borden was in the act of stepping from the rock, when Pierre raised an objecting voice:

"Give me a man—a man to fight! That is better! No judges but those in holsters for me! I will meet any man at ten paces, and abide by the issue."

The Kid sprang forward.

"I accept that challenge. I know this man Pierre. By every law of earth and heaven he ought to die. But a thousand deaths would not wash his hands of blood. There are things you do not know, things that call for vengeance. A friend crushed by this monster—" The Kid choked for a moment, then went on: "As a cougar rends the unsuspecting deer. For that he must die, and not by judge or jury, but by my hand."

While the boy was speaking, Pierre leaned forward, his teeth showing white under the dark mustache which was rimmed with blood from the gag which had just been removed. There was a wicked glitter in his eyes.

"He thought she was alone in the world, that there was none to avenge the deed; so he went his way, and she to her grave. That day

I was but a lad; I did not know firearms. But I would wait; I would be patient. Sometime, when I was certain of the heart of a hare at twenty paces, and when life would be sweet to him, then I would take it from him. That time has come. Gentlemen, you must turn this man over to me. I shall give him an equal chance, no more, no less."

The boy stood with hand at holster, waiting. The Frenchman panted with fear and hate, his dark eyes glittering dangerously.

"Let the rascal be turned over to the boy!" came from all sides, and Borden, quick to feel the mind of the crowd, knew it would be useless to oppose the demand.

"Give him his gun, and untie his hands, but not his feet. This is to the death!" The Kid spoke in a low voice, but there was the certainty of natural law in it.

Here and there a revolver glinted in the moonlight. The crowd drew back.

"Don't you come any tricks, Pierre, or I'll kill you myself. Wait the word, and don't fire too soon," said Burke, as the Kid backed to ten paces.

"I am ready, gentlemen!" The boy spoke in the same colorless voice, his hand at his hip.

"Then, take the count—One, two—" The reports cut the last word in the speaking, and

the Frenchman reeled and fell, with arms spread wide, his evil face turned to the stars.

Burke leaned over the twitching body. "Center of the forehead, boys," he said, laconically.

"You see, gentlemen, I have practiced that shot for three years, till I could hit the head of a chipmunk at fifteen paces five out of six and give myself the count."

Not a voice broke the stillness as the Kid walked out of the crowd. Two hours later the stage rolled by, and on it a midnight passenger. At a word the driver drew up, and a trim figure leaned down from the boot and shook hands with Borden, with a catch in the words of farewell.

XXXII

DRAWING THE LINES

AS the election drew near, that unreasonable thing known as "party spirit" broke into full flame.

It was now open war between the Miners' Rest and every saloon in town, and that war was to the death! An attempt was made to burn the place, but the barking of Brookie's dog revealed the presence of the intruders, and the plan was thwarted. The supreme moment had come, and Borden gathered his forces for the struggle.

Deadman had taken on the proud distinction of an incorporated town, and planned a typical city government for itself. Things should be done in decency and in order.

In all the saloons, resinous liquors flowed without price to all who would drink. Flags appeared over the drinking-places and dance-halls, and flamboyant decorations covered up the dreariness of the unpapered walls. Orators, vitalized with noxious liquors, did honor to a Bacchanalian scheme of things. The mob lis-

tened with ready applause. The Miners' Rest must go down! Hurrah! They would put it down. Members of Pierre's gang called loudly for vengeance, and fomented disorder and dissatisfaction.

In the back rooms of the Bald Eagle, the friends of the saloon worked out a ticket; the name of the owner of that place was put down for mayor. To offset this, Borden and his friends put up a citizens' ticket, on which his own name appeared for mayor, against his protest. Once in the struggle, he strained every nerve to sweep the ranks of decency to victory.

Carefully he and a few others framed the planks, and snugly fixed among the others was one which meant the overthrow of the drinking-places, if the ticket carried. When this platform appeared, the saloon men rose in storms of protest; their indignation was boundless. Threats left on doors, and sent by unsigned letters, warned the leaders of the Rest element that their lives would pay the forfeit if they persisted. Evil-mouthed men swaggered through the streets rank with blasphemy. Plots to start trouble fell through, because those for whom the traps were intended refused to be led into them. Through these crowds Borden shouldered with a smile and an air of resolution which caused the groups to quail at his approach.

Once more the fighting blood in him was up. He would win, or know the reason why.

At this time Old Lucky began to do effective work for the Miners' Rest. Day and night, he went among the cabins, finding men when they would listen, and talking to them of the benefits of the place that had done so much, not only for the miners, but for their families. Many were reminded of this, who would have squandered what they had in rioting and drinking. In time, the old man's influence began to tell, and the saloon-keepers noticed a falling away in the enthusiasm which usually greeted the outbursts of the orators hired to talk against the Rest.

Constantly, the lines of moral demarkation became clearer. For the first time, Borden was feeling the strength and vindictiveness of evil. When he had raised his voice in praise of Moloch, then he had been hailed as a royal fellow, a choice spirit. Now the lips were cursing which had flattered him. Men were seen skulking about his cabin at night. Turning quickly, he had discovered a form dogging his steps. Street rows were started, in which a stray bullet was to reach his heart. But Borden faced the opposition without fear, and when the lash of wickedness struck him in the face he uttered no word, but gathered himself for a more desperate struggle.

In all its dragonish deformity, the love of money stood out before him. That desire was the mainspring of the murderous opposition. Could he have convinced his feverish enemies that all chance for gain was gone, they would have ceased their opposition at once.

As the tide rose against him, he thought of Gene Truxton. In fact, she never was absent from his mind very long at a time. With a shudder, he remembered his own career, and how disgusting it must have been to her. No wonder she had not cared to refer to him in her letters. The thing he was fighting had not only debauched the men of the mountains, but it had possibly robbed him of that which would have made him endlessly happy, the love of a woman who above all others was worthy of his regard.

XXXIII

WHERE THE STAR LED

EVERY man whose name appeared on the register at the Miners' Rest entered into the fight with a will. The honor of the institution was at stake, and, incidentally, their own.

Campaign matter scattered through the town denounced the place as a nest of meddlers in other men's business, and Borden as the chief meddler of all. The trouble-makers were busy. The militant spirit ran riot. To all this, Borden and his friends made no reply, but continued to work quietly. There were many talks in tunnel and by camp-fire, in the stopes and the shaft. Men argued it out in their cabins at night, and the result was that the influence of the Rest grew rapidly. All looked forward to the great rally in the big hall. Things were to happen then worth while.

Borden planned a banquet for the last night. All was to be free, with plenty of singing. There would be speaking and other features of entertainment. To this rally of good fellowship, a blanket invitation was issued. The leading

women of the camp were to be present; in their goodness of heart, many had volunteered to serve tables. This was a winning idea, and from everywhere came assurances that the miners intended to be there.

Against this, the opposition planned a rival demonstration. Tinsel and glare flashed in the dance-halls. Painted sirens were imported to add zest to the pageantry; the floors were to be washed with wine, and the bars spread with delicious beeswing. All were asked to the feast of Belial, without price or distinction.

Bold and revolting rose the black front of the bars and brothels, and against it hardened the solid ranks of the clean element. The last day arrived. Borden knew that the men would be in the mines and mills till night, and this was his opportunity. At the doors of cabins, at the mouths of tunnels, men would wait to invite their companions to the banquet.

For several days the preparations were going on. Borden's hand went out filled with his own gold, and no account was kept. The cooks looked to him for their pay. There was plenty for all. Kelly insisted that he be permitted to have a share in the expenses, and that big-hearted wit stopped at no expense to make the program a success.

The novelty of the whole affair interested

the miners, and they planned to be there, from the least to the greatest. The Color was to sing; the Cornish quartet was ready with the latest songs. Kelly was delighted. He had seen to it that the girl was put in a prominent place on the program. Borden supervised the whole matter, and saw that nothing was overlooked. Tables were arranged the entire length of the great hall. When all was ready, he selected his committee of invitation and gave them their instructions.

The next day was the election, and the saloons would be closed by the State law. If he could control the situation till midnight, he believed he could realize his dream and drive the drinking-places and dance-halls out of the camp. The editor at Boulder Bar had found an opportunity for lively comment in the new element which was manifesting itself at Deadman, and he had exhausted his limited vocabulary in abuse and sarcasm.

Borden had much to say when the time should come; then he would leave it all to the decision of the ballots cast. Wishing to be alone, he took the trail up the slope, to the cabin made sacred by Gene Truxton. There was something inexpressively lonely about the place. The old pines seemed asking for her, their long arms stretched in appeal.

Entering, he sat down in the chair by the table and glanced around. All was as she left it, except that rust showed red on the stove, and a picture had fallen loose at one corner. He rose and fastened it, and resumed his seat. Out of the atmosphere seemed to come something of her personality. The crude logs breathed it, and the furniture accentuated it.

The old ache came back to him intensified, and he rose to leave. Before passing out, he turned, and his eye ranged over each object. All these her hands had touched. By that window she used to sit and watch the stars fill up the sky spaces. There at the bedside she had prayed. Did she remember him? He knew she did, for she had promised that. Obeying a feeling infinitely tender, he sank upon his knees in the spot where she had knelt, and breathed a thousand blessings upon her, wherever she might be. About her image he wove the holiness of his love, yet there were no tears on his lashes, and there was no weakness in his face. All that the morning sunlight revealed was a calm resignation, which only those who make great surrenders can know. His heart panted for her. He wanted her beyond words to express, but there was no outburst; there was no feverish complaint. All his being condensed into asking just for her. One touch of her

hand, one sound of her voice, and the world might go to whom it would. But this could not be. The gulf had opened between them, and it never would close. To the end he must walk the stony path without her. Leaving the cabin, with its haunting suggestions, Borden entered the forest and was seen no more till night.

When he returned, he found Kelly in high spirits, singing his favorite songs, and crashing about the cabin, doing all manner of aimless things. The Irishman surprised Borden when he entered by grasping his hand and breaking into disjointed talk.

"I tell you, Borden, it's all right! Things are coming your way. You can't guess how things are stacking up! We'll win, sure as shooting, we'll win! I've a notion to smash you just for luck. I hear the boys are coming from everywhere. Arrah! This is the greatest day of your life, boy, and you must make good. When you get up to make that speech, do your best! Do you get me? Do your best!"

"I'm glad you feel hopeful, Jim," Borden replied, wondering at the excitement of his partner. "I will do what I can to put the thing through."

"I know that. And now let me tell you right here, we win! No question about that,

we win! The saloon men are scared crazy. All their preparation has amounted to very little. The boys are coming our way. There has been some pledge-taking to keep sober over election day, and to be at the banquet. We'll lick the boots off them! They don't stand a show on earth. The fight is ours right now, and the gamblers are saying so in every saloon in town. There won't be enough to sing bass at the Bald Eagle to-night. And it's all your doings, Borden—all your doings, and I'm proud of you, sure as you're born!"

Borden had never seen Kelly so stirred up before, and his own spirit kindled at the news. As they went down the trail through the clasp-ing night, Kelly repeatedly slapped Borden on the back, and insisted on holding to his arm, while he talked in a jumbled way of the part The Color was to play in the program, and how well she was going to do. Never could he repay Miss Truxton for what she had done for the girl. If only she could have been with them! Borden winced. That would fill his cup to the brim; his joy would be boundless.

"You must have The Color tell her all about this night, Kelly—that is, if we win," Borden reminded quietly.

"Don't worry about that; she'll get it all," Kelly assured.

As they drew near the Miners' Rest, Borden saw men coming alone and in groups. The place would be crowded to its utmost capacity. The fire of the true orator burned within him. He longed to pour his heart out to these men; to set before them the things he had dreamed. As they entered, a ringing cheer greeted them, and Burke's voice was heard thundering out something about a clean town and a white man for a mayor. Another round of applause followed this, and Borden found himself the center of animated groups who insisted on shaking hands with him.

Miners were still coming, and soon every available space was filled. Then came the feast. The men, clad in overalls and blue flannel shirts, seated themselves at the long tables, and the steaming dishes were relieved of their contents in short order. As fast as one dish was emptied, another took its place, filled to overflowing. Up and down the tables flitted the women, dressed in cool white. The Color was looking her prettiest, and Jim's eyes followed her with unconcealed pride.

Again and again the dishes were filled, till every man had been supplied. Then the tables were removed and the seats arranged for the mass-meeting. On these, four hundred men were packed like sardines in a box, all in high

spirits and loud in their expressions of appreciation of the dinner.

First, a string band rendered several selections, returning repeatedly at the call of the crowd. Then came the Cornish quartet, and Borden, closely following every feature of the program, knew he never had heard them do so well. At every chesty outburst of applause his spirit rose with hope.

In a dainty dress, The Color came on the platform and sang in a girl's clear voice a song that bore on the purpose of the gathering. Borden learned later that she and Kelly had produced it between them for the occasion. The miners greeted her with thundering cheers, and she did her best, retiring flushed and pleased. All looked upon The Color as their own. Many of the men had teased her when she ran about the camp barefooted, and others had held her on their laps. They were proud of her to-night. Out of the storm of sound came the cackling laugh of Brookie, declaring that all the girl was she owed to the Angel O' Deadman.

Then came a flutter of paper along the rows, as the men looked for the next number on the list. Borden glanced over the program, written in Kelly's best hand, and saw that his own name was the next, and last.

When he mounted the platform and faced

the eager rows, a tempest of applause shook the building. For some time Borden waited for quiet, while the men showed their enthusiasm for one who had manifested such unselfish interest in them.

At the moment when Borden would have begun, Old Lucky shuffled into the hall, his face animated as none ever had seen it before. Striding well to the front, his heavy boots clumping along the floor, he announced in a high voice that he had just come from an inspection of the saloons and they were lonesome. The dance-halls were listless, and the bartenders idle and angry. They were confessing defeat two to one. This threw the crowd into storms of applause, and Old Lucky sat down, covered with the glory which comes to the bearer of good news.

Borden began with a caution against overconfidence. While it did seem that they were within sight of victory, there might be reverses, and persistent work must continue to the last moment. Gradually he warmed to his theme, and the native eloquence which was his began to grip his hearers with indefinable power. In burning speech he reviewed the history of the Judas element in the camp. One by one the ghastly murders were depicted, and the rallying-places and training-schools of the blood-letters

were shown to be the drinking-places of the camp.

In chaste language he referred to the one who had conceived the idea of a place where the miners could meet in a clean atmosphere, and catch glimpses of better things. He paused here, while Laughing Brookie nodded and voiced his agreement aloud.

Words flowed from his lips like water, as he drew a picture of the camp purged of these places which constantly incited to the worst there was in the soul of a man. Unsparingly he told of his own folly, and of his change. They would bear him witness that he had shaken the rags from his soul.

Resistless as a mountain flood he swept them on. Far up the glowing slopes of manhood he wooed them; painted them the glory of achievement, the splendor of victory. With a master hand he swept the harp-strings of memory, as he led them back to the knees where in boyhood they gathered, and by the mounds, long covered with uncut grass, till out of the past came the touch of lost twilights, the shining of eyes and the mirth of voices gone from them forever.

Men sat spellbound. Many were moved to tears, and drew their rough hands across their eyes. Their feelings were melting. Things

they had not guessed were in them asserted themselves. From height to height they were being lifted. Over the fen-bogs of excess, out of the upas swamps of failure, up the flowery slopes of worthy achievement, on and up, past the stars, past self to—God!

It was done. There was no such thing as holding the pent feelings of the men longer. Jack Harrington leaped upon a seat and exploded the magazine. Old Lucky followed, and the next instant four hundred men were on their feet, waving their hats and cheering till the sound rolled up the canyon and into the ears of the barkeeps leaning in their doors.

Down the aisle surged Kelly, followed by Burke, Harrington and others. The next instant Borden was lifted to their shoulders and carried repeatedly up and down the room. In that moment, Borden knew that what he had battled for was his. Nothing could take from those men what had come to them in that hour; nothing could stand before their purpose.

As the excited crowd sank once more to their seats, Borden found himself by the door, through which came a soft stir of night air.

XXXIV

AN HOUR THAT WAS LOVE'S

THE taste of the cool was good, and Borden drank it deeply. The glow of victory was upon him. He had proved himself master of the situation, and the triumph was his. Now he could bring his thoughts back to their favorite channel.

If only she who had made this hour possible could have been there to have a part in it all! Borden realized now as never before how much he owed the woman who had come and gone from his life like a fair dream. More than that, the life of every man who had listened to him had been influenced by the same chaste power. As his thoughts drifted into the past, reaction set in, and a pensive mood dominated him.

Out of the lost days came tender memories—the times she had smiled him welcome as he went and came on the trail; the few chance meetings here and there, and that one under the pines in the glade, when he had acted the fool. Gradually, the chesty roar of the hall went out

of his ears, and he wandered in a trance of sweet longing.

From this profound absorption Borden was recalled by Kelly, who had grasped his arm and was pouring something into his ears about the best thing on the program. The face of the Irishman never had glowed as now. Borden wondered at it as he looked at him curiously.

"Turn around, you yap, and give attention to the last number," he heard Kelly say, and mechanically he obeyed. As his eyes reached the stage, he grew tense as a bow-string, and stood motionless, for there, more beautiful than he ever had seen her, stood Gene Truxton, the old, winsome glory on her bright hair, and her cheeks greatly flushed with the excitement of the occasion.

Had she materialized out of the star sheen, or dropped from the rim of a passing cloud, his surprise could not have been more complete. Borden felt an iron grip on his hand . . . Kelly was crushing it with both of his. The joy of it was maddening! The great thirst within him drank deeply of the charm of her presence. Love and longing and hope rose mightily within him, and Kelly winced under the grasp of the hand which closed over his.

Then, like music on smooth waters, her voice floated out to him and filled the hall with

its cultured fullness; flooded through the door and swooned away among the listening pines. Such a voice! To Borden it was like the sound which charmed the shepherds under the stars near Bethlehem. He was impelled to go to her at once. There would have been no shame. The glory of his love would have made it like confessing faith in God. Then came the saving second thought. What reason had he to think she would receive him if he did? He drew up strong and calm. As a magnet he held her glance, though she struggled against it.

Borden knew the song was done, for the miners had gone wild. Laughing Brookie was on a bench waving his hat as vigorously as his corpulence would permit. The air was filled with swinging arms. In the whirlwind, Gene left the platform. Borden had a glimpse of delicate blue as she disappeared.

The blood bounded in his veins as he stepped into the night. At the edge of the woods he was overtaken by Old Lucky, Jack and Kelly.

"Did you know she was here?" Borden asked, turning to Kelly.

"Sure! She got in on the night stage, she and the old gent, and this morning came down to see The Color. That was the first any of us knew. It seems that Aunt Ruth died suddenly, and the old gent got the fever to come back to

the mountains, and they did, without taking time to study about it. I understand he has invested again in this section. When I found out she was here, I planned a little surprise for you—see?”

“And that reminds me of something else,” broke in Lucky. “It was that gal who saved your life the time you was in the hands of Pierre. You never knowed that, ’cause she made us promise not to tell. It would a-been all-night-till-morning with you if it hadn’t been for her. But Kelly and the rest of us said we wouldn’t tell till she gave us her consent. I heard she was here, and, thinks I, it’s time Bord knew about that matter up in the canyon, and so I sez to her, sez I, ‘Miss Truxton, I want you to let me tell Borden about that little affair up cabin way, ’cause I calculate to tell him anyway. Borden,’ sez I, ‘is one of the best men God A’mighty ever put breath in, and he ought to know it for several reasons.’”

“What did she say?” broke in Kelly.

“Oh, she just looked at me with them eyes of hern and said sort o’ quiet like, ‘You may tell him, Mr. Lucky, if you want to.’”

“Tell me about it, Lucky; every detail.” Borden was outwardly calm, but Kelly felt his hand tighten on his.

“Well, you see, it was this way: The Ruby

Kid got in on it and came tearing down the trail for help. Up there, somewhere, he met her, and told her what was doing, and that the rascals at the cabin was just waitin' till old Pierre got back to swing you up. Well, sir, when she heard that, what did she do? Well, she didn't go wringin' her hands and making a big pow-wow, like most women would, but she just hustled down to the cabin and got an automatic and went up the trail.

"The Kid had told her the lay of the land, and she crept through the laurel till she could hear all them devils was a-sayin' by the cabin. That way she learned what trail he was comin' by. Then she went back, and, hidin' behind a tree at the edge of the glade, she stepped out and made him put up his hands when he came along, and when we got there she had him face up against a tree with the end of the automatic pressin' between his shoulders. The old villain was swearin' hard, but he dasent move. There it is, sir. I've itched to tell you long ago, but—I'd promised.

"Now, another thing. You have won completely in this fight. The chaps uptown have hung up their aprons; they know it's all off with 'em fur good. They've heard the gal is back, and they know what that means. Every miner in Deadman would go to hell for her, if

she wanted 'em to. The barkeeps is packin' to get out, and you can just set it down that Old Lucky knows!" The old prospector gripped Borden's hand and clumped away.

"And you knew she saved my life?" Borden turned to Kelly with the question.

"Yes; but you heard what Lucky said; she didn't want it told. I suppose you know why?"

"I almost dare to believe I do," Borden added fervently.

"I knew it would do your old eyes good to see her, Bord, and that was why I was right down glad myself. Why, hang it all, man, suppose The Color had been gone that long—?" Kelly broke off with a most expressive gesture. "But she won't be. We've got that all nicely fixed for a near date, and I'll be asking for witnesses and congratulations soon."

"Same here!" broke in Harrington, enthusiastically.

"How's that, Jack?" from Kelly.

"Well, I don't think she'd care if I told you fellows. The Queen and I have made arrangements for our future happiness, and that's why she came back with Miss Truxton. She's good as gold, and I'm not ashamed to say that I think my all of her." Turning to Borden, he continued: "That was all a mistake. I was a presumptuous fool! I knew it to-night when

she stood there looking like she had just been with God in the mountain, and I was glad that she opened my eyes to the fact that I was a conceited blockhead. The old days are to be forgotten; I have buried them forever. The girl is beautiful in her new life, and too good for me at the worst, and I—do—care a lot for—her!”

Borden was too full for many words, but there was thankfulness in the handclasp which he gave the two men.

“Now, one thing more before I hunt up the Queen—for she made me promise not to stay long—you covered yourself with glory to-night. That was a masterful plea, and I congratulate you, the future mayor of Deadman! Miss Truxton stood back of the partition and heard it all . . .” Borden’s eyes asked for more. “Yes, she thinks it was grand. I saw her breathing fast when you reached those high flights, and especially when you spoke of her. That’s enough, old man; don’t be a fool again.” Harrington walked away. Turning to Kelly, Borden placed his hand on his shoulder.

“You have known all the time that I loved her, Kelly?”

“Yes, Bord.”

“And you believe—that is—you think—?”

“Not a doubt of it; and she’s the most won-

derful woman in the world—except one. God bless you, old pard; I'm gone." Kelly went off, whistling at his best rate, and Borden walked into the forest.

His heart was full and his thoughts in a tumult with a maddening joy. The sense of the loss of her had become a habit, and to doubt that she could ever be his almost a part of him. But this mood had been shattered by what he had heard, and he walked—swung up the trail—with the old, free stride. He wished to be alone, and something drew him toward her cabin.

Out of the night came a clasping peace, a largeness of soul which exalted him. Above him the sky spaces were sown with dim stars. The moon sisters were a-dance in the glades, where the light fell into shining pools. Far up in the tops of the pines the wind was at its grieving, sweeter than the chimes of Normandy. From far away came the murmur of the river, and nearer a small stream babbled with happy lips. High above, the prismatic mountains shot back the clear flashing of worlds.

Borden moved on aimlessly through the undergrowth, where wild things made love. About him the aspens showered their trembling leaves. He was walking the frontiers of silence—of soothing remoteness. With keen mind he

went over the past—the first meeting, and all the other meetings; the folly which had plunged him into dissipation; the trial of his soul when the wolf packs of the big-limbed storm ran beside him with flashing fangs. Then had come days of loneliness—weeks and months of hungry resignation; but before that—peace, and a knowledge that he was clean.

For an hour he sat watching the wind-stirred trees; then he rose and walked out of the grove, crossed a grassy space and approached the old cabin. The open spot about the door was gorgeous with soft light. Borden noticed indifferently that the door was open, but it conveyed no meaning to him. With uncovered head he stood waiting. To his heart this was the center of all things. Intuitively he waited—for what, he could not say, only with his spirit. He had been waiting for months. He still was calling with empty hands. It was the assertion of being, the wisdom of the life principle.

Nor was he surprised when a light step drew his attention.

“Were you waiting for me?” she asked, stepping into the embracing splendor.

“Yes; all these long, hopeless months—just waiting!”

She came and stood before him in her

old, haunting beauty, her bright hair falling in a cloud of glory about her face.

"Was it from here that you called me—called from the sides of the world?"

"Yes, from here—from everywhere—and you came!"

"It was right that I should; your trial had been enough."

"You expected to find me here, then?"

"Yes. This has been a soul appointment since time began. I wanted such a moon and such a night, with the wind in the pines."

Without a word he drew her to him with strong, resistless arms, and bent upon her a searching glance, as if to read her soul.

"Then, you love me—Gene, I know."

Her answer was a lift of her eyes to his. In that look he read her heart, and his lips, holy with chaste feeling, pressed her own, the bright head pillowed upon his breast.

"My darling!" he murmured, "I give you all—all!"

"And to you I give my heart, dear Paul, a woman's heart, filled with the white glory of love—the only great love I can ever know. And you are worthy, my brave, my splendid one!"

He held her close, possessed with a wild, mad joy. Lifting his hand, he pointed into the mystery-haunted night.

"Out and on forever we two go sailing.
Past all the islands of time, over the vast for-
ever. When the last sun has burned out like a
candle, and fallen from immensity, our fair
sails of love will be spread to divine breezes.
The lips of life are steeped in sacred wine.
'Though I have lien among the pots, yet I am
as a dove's wings covered with silver and her
feathers with yellow gold!' "

A sigh came out of the hemlocks, and in the
aspen thickets a more passionate trembling.
The glory of the June night fell upon them, and
sanctified them with its chaste power. The old,
old pines lifted up their arms in bene-
as if to bless them. From the vale below
the sound of white waters, and out of the
mellow hush a man's voice vibrant with grati-
tude:

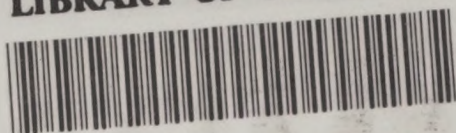
"God, I thank thee!"

THE END.





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